



환생은 관능/ 해가지고

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INTIME FUSION FANTASY STORY

intime

I Reincarnated For Nothing

– 환생은 괜히 해가지고 –

- Part 1 -

**-Author-
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[NaughtyOtter (Wuxiaworld)]

- STORY -

“My life as a demon... No. My life as human is really...”

Artpe was supposed to live a charmed life as the 4th strongest in the Demon King's Army. However, his life was cut short by the hero's blade.

With his previous life's memory intact, Artpe will live his life again. His boldness and resourcefulness will make him unrivalled!

Chapter 0

Prologue

He was the weakest of the Four Heavenly Kings, and he was the leader of the Rebirth Demon King's Enforcement army. His name was Artpe Hirtana Kelduke.

His name was spread across the human world as being one of the Four Heavenly Kings.

If one mentioned the Four Heavenly Kings of the Demon King's army, the humans would think about the monsters that could cause the mountains to fall. They were seen as beings that could cause earthquakes and the seas to dry. However, Artpe was different.

He was someone, who had been recognized by the Demon King, through polishing his strange ability. He was named to the prestigious title of being one of the Four Heavenly Kings thanks to his strange ability

However, he was weak.

He would make an entrance with an awesome aura wrapped around him, but in the end, he would die by the hands of the hero's party. Then a being with a more awesome aura would show up and say, 'Hoo hoo hoo. In truth, he was the weakest of the Four Heavenly Kings!' In this story, he was casted as being the weakest of the Four Heavenly Kings.

“The hero is really coming, commander. Don't we have to run away before that happens?”

As expected of the subordinates under the weakest of the Four Heavenly Kings, all the demons under his direct command were lacking in firepower. On top of it all, their temperament was lacking too.

“If you want to run away, you should try running away.”

“I'm sorry!”

His subordinate was thinking about running away even before the fight. He hit his

subordinate in the back of the head, and he climbed to the top of the Demon King's castle. When he did, he could clearly see the hero's party coming through a doghole created to bypass the castle wall. It seemed this was their attempt at secretly infiltrating the castle.

Whenever a Demon King was born to conquer the world, a hero always appeared to put a spoke in the wheel. The hero was the Demon King army's ultimate enemy.

"She really is here. The Demon King on borrowed time now."

The hero had appeared around three years ago, yet she was already here. Who would have expected that?

Artpe couldn't smack himself in the back of the head for having such a thought.

Still, he was a bit relieved. She was here much earlier than expected. There was no way the hero would be able to win against the Demon king.

"The problem is my troops will be the first to face them."

Maybe a Demon King's mind was reshaped when the successor puts on the crown. The crazy Demon King had a terrible personality, and he always sent the weakest amongst the Demon race to fight the hero first.

This strong-willed hero was able to rapidly grow for the past 3 years, because the weakest demons were sent first. Then the degree of difficulty was slowly increased as the troops failed. If the Demon King wasn't a lord, Artpe would have smacked him in the back of the head.

Currently, Artpe was moving, and the reason behind his action was obvious. The weakest force in the Demon King's castle was his force, and he was their commander. No one from the Demon King's castle would lift a finger until every single one of them were killed.

Artpe decided to look on the bright side. He was one of the Four Heavenly Kings. Would he really be killed by a new hero? The last time he checked on her level was about an year ago, and the hero had been level 200. She might have grown a little bit, but she wouldn't even be able to scratch the Demon King's castle.

"Let's check her out first."

This was the ability that allowed Artpe to reach his command post. He activated the 'Read All Creation'. It was as the words implied. It was an ability that allowed him to find out information about anything that exists in this world. His innate ability was one of the reason why the Demon King kept Artpe by his side.

He had trained his ability through the years, so he was able to successfully activate his ability from a long distance.

Several lines appeared in front of his eyes. It was written in the language of the Demon Clan.

[Name - Maetel]

[Race : Human Female]

[Title : Hero]

Artpe was at a loss for words. He had known the female hero was a commoner, and her name was Maetel. However, he lost the ability to speak when he read the last line.

[Level : 374]

“.....”

“What should we do, commander?”

He couldn't even hear the question asked by his subordinate, who stood by his side. Artpe's mind was in a confused state.

What? 374?

When he checked up on her only a year ago, he was sure she was only level 200! The Demon King had just reached level 400!

“Hey. Did we do something to the humans recently?”

What caused the worm to become a dragon?

“The Demon King wanted spice things up a little bit, so he personally dispatched several armies to where the hero lived. Now that I think about it, I heard no news of

their return.”

“Ah-ha. He wanted to spice things up a little bit? Kyah. I didn't know about that!”

He marinated her so perfectly that a hero appeared as a full course meal! That son of a bitch! I should just call him a chef instead of a Demon King!

Artpe's subordinate looked at Artpe's stormy expression, and he immediately grasped the situation. His subordinate made a sour face as he asked Artpe a question.

“Should we run away, commander?”

“Yeah. Now I want to run away too.”

This was beating a dead horse, but Artpe was the weak. However, in the end, he was still one of the Four Heavenly Kings. He was level 350, and he had considerable amount of skills. However, this was also why he knew what the disparity between him and the hero meant.

Even a single level difference meant one's soul was outclassed. It was impossible to beat the other unless one had a really good Skill.

What would happen if there was a difference of 24 levels? Even if he gathered all his soul to oppose the hero, he would be destroyed by a single move.

Artpe really wanted to run away. He wanted to crawl through the doghole made by the hero. How great would it be if he could run away to a place where a being from the Demon race wouldn't be recognized? He wanted to go to a peaceful place where fighting and war didn't exist. How great would it be if he could just live as he raised some cows!

“Koo-ooh-ooh.”

When he had that thought, a red choker appeared on his smooth neck, and it ruthlessly tightened around his neck. It put pressure on his body and mind. He was owned by another. The Demon King's Innate Ability called Absolute Control was activated.

When one was defeated by the Demon King, the Demon King's Innate Ability activated to control his opponent. Once his innate ability took hold, it was impossible to escape from it. One had to follow all his orders, and if one held thoughts that ran contrary to

his orders, one's neck would be choked.

When that happens, death was the final outcome. One had to turn back into a docile sheep to follow his order, or one could just choose to die. Artpe had to select one of the two choices right now.

Artpe wanted to live a little bit more, so he chose the former option. The choking sensation around his neck quickly disappeared.

“Commander.....”

“It's all right. Don't say anything.”

There were several times in the past when he felt the sensation of being choked to death. It was akin to what happened a moment ago. On such occasions, Artpe struggled to live by not resisting against the orders of the Demon King. This was why he was able to stay alive until now.

He had experienced scenes of violence until he was fed of with it. He wouldn't be broken by a mere hero.

However, it was also clear that he would lose for sure if events continued along down this path. Artpe thought hard on how he'll be able to survive this. In the end, he chose the last resort. He hadn't wanted to choose this option.

“.....please go contact Etna-nim.”

She was the only woman amongst the Four Heavenly Kings. She was the leader of the Army of Thieves. Her name was Etna Carlyfate Mirecard. She was ranked second in Four Heavenly King's ranking. However, the most important part was that she was in love with Artpe.

“Tell her I'll agree to the Soul Pact if she helps me. She'll come here after she gets permission from the Demon King.”

The Soul Pact was the absolute contract of amity that could be made amongst two Demons. Basically, it signified marriage.

“.....do you really want to marry her? You still won't be able to die a natural death.”

“Can't you see I'm about to die right now? You really want to argue about this right now? Are you trying to pick a fight with me? Do you want to die before me?”

When Artpe browbeat him, his underling quickly ran into the castle. He let out a sigh at this sight.

Etna was a beautiful and powerful woman. Even amongst the Demon race, who was famous for being ill tempered, she clearly possessed a pure nature. This was why she was popular amongst her subordinates. A woman of such caliber liked him. This was a big blessing for him even if she wasn't his type.

So why did Artpe turn down her proposal until now? The man, who was ranked 1st amongst the Four Heavenly Kings, was in love with Etna. Artpe didn't want to make enemy of this man, so he had turned down her offer.

However, he couldn't worry about making a future enemy right now. The hero's party was coming towards him, and they were too scary for him to worry about the implications of his action.

Ah, they were already running amuck.

His two eyes clearly saw the sight of his Enforcement army being crushed in a distressing manner. It was true. He was really afraid.

Please come before it is too late!

Please allow Etna to participate in the battle, Demon King! If you leave them be like this, you will also be in danger! Please allow her to participate in this, Sheff!

“Please don't cause any trouble, and surrender to us, Four Heavenly King Artpe Hirtana Kelduke. There is no need for us to fight each other any longer.”

It was all too late.

Fuck this demonic life of his...

Artpe looked at the innocent looking girl, who was the hero. She had her sword pointed towards his neck, and she had a slightly sorrowful expression on her face. He let out a hollow laugh.

“You make it sound as the Demon King's army isn't on a campaign to bring about world peace.”

She probably didn't know about the existence of the shackles that bound all demons under the Demon King's service. Even if he didn't want to fight, he had to force himself to fight. He didn't like killing humans, yet he had to force himself to kill them. She probably didn't even know such a demon existed within the Demon race.

If she found out about the truth, this kind girl would probably be unable to swing her sword against them. However, Artpe decided not to tell her anything. Since things had progressed this far, he thought it might be better if she was able to kill the Demon King once and for all.

“Still, the others around you seems better equipped for this.”

There was a magician, a warrior equipped with a shield and a sharp-eyed thief with a dagger. If Artpe said or did anything funny, they would kill him without giving him any quarter.

They knew the truth behind the Demon race, yet they still decided to walk the road of carnage. They were true heroes, and Artpe admired them. They were qualified to be by the side of this heroine.

“Hero. I'm pretty sure a very good looking noonim will be coming here soon, and she'll be very angry when she sees my corpse. I want you to give her this message.”

Artpe's weird and offbeat words were taken as being a start of some kind of ploy by the thief. The thief moved immediately. He was incredibly fast. He might be faster than the hero.

It was understandable. There was no burning animosity shown towards the hero by Artpe, and it seemed she would need a good amount of time before she could bring herself to apply the final blow to him. Her impatient comrade had stepped forward to try to kill him in her stead. Artpe had expected such a move.

“In truth, I..... Kuh-huhk!”

The thief's dagger pierced through Artpe's heart. The blade was sharper and deadlier than the ugly past of his childhood. It had shredded his heart, but Artpe didn't die immediately.

“In truth, I'm not too fond of older women... Kahk. Please tell her...!”

“W... what the hell are you talking about? Why are you saying such strange words! This makes you... It makes you seem like a normal person.....!”

The hero had a sad expression on her face. It was as if she was about to cry. When Artpe faced her pure sadness, he felt better. He grinned.

In the end, he would die, but his tedious life would come to an end.

If he was born again, he wanted to be born in a place where he was free of that damn Demon King.

Artpe gave a heartfelt prayer as he closed his eyes.

Before he died, he heard the angry shout of a woman, but he didn't care. He was about to die, so it was none of his business.

This was how Artpe Hirtana Kelduke died.

He was one of the Four Heavenly Kings in the Demon King army, but his death was miserable. It held no weight.

In his last moments, he could see two lines of words etched into his retina. However, his consciousness was already fading into death.

[Innate Ability Read All Creation has evolved.]

[Secret Option Rewrite is Activated.]

When he opened his eyes again, he was in the form of a small male child.

“Huh?”

Didn't a thief ruthlessly stab a dagger into his heart a moment ago? Artpe was having a hard time getting used to his rapidly changed situation. He looked around his surrounding.

It was a very small and worn down hut. The window up top was letting in sunlight, and the light illuminated a cloud of dust. This looked like a place where humans would

live. Now that he thought about it, it seemed he had taken the form of a male human child!

‘Is this Illusion Magic?’

However, this thought lasted only for a brief moment. His soul held his Innate Ability called Read All Creation. It allowed him to pierce through all lies. It showed him only the truth. This was why he was sure he wasn’t under any Illusion magic.

‘Mirror. I have to find a mirror. I have to assess what kind of situation I am in.’

His ability, Read All Creation, was an incredible power. However, if he wanted to Read himself, he needed a reflective surface to see himself. It didn’t matter if the reflection came in form of a puddle, mirror or even a person’s eyes.

He searched the small and dirty hut, but he couldn’t find a mirror. In the end, he was successfully in finding a bowl on top of the kitchen table.

He poured enough water into the bowl, and he could see a blurred image of himself.

“.....it is me.”

He had black hair and purple colored eyes. He had white enough skin to be called pale. It had been a long time ago, but his face was identical to the face he had when he was a very young Demon. It was indisputable. Artpe was himself, but at the same time, it was indisputable that he was a human.

Artpe was still in the midst of despairing when his Innate Ability Read All Creation delivered the final blow.

[Name - Artpe]

[Race : Human Male]

[Level : 1]

[Strength : 3, Agility : 2, Stamina : 2, Magic Energy : 19]

[Innate Ability : Read All Creation(Step 2)]

His name, race and level were all too shocking! If there was a god, he wanted to kill the bastard! He'll kill the god alongside the Demon King!

“.....huh?”

Soon, Artpe realized the most shocking part was still left for him to be discovered.

[Innate Ability : Read All Creation(Step 2)]

His Read All Creation was now on Step 2?

‘When did the Innate Ability develop stages?’

It happened when Artpe was thinking over this question.

The door to the hut opened, and a human ran in from outside.

“Let's play, Artpe!”

The one, who spoke, was a beautiful human girl.

She had such beautiful golden hair that it was almost unbelievable that a commoner had such hair.

Her emerald colored eyes were bright and passionate.

Instead of the rag she was wearing, a silk dress would have gone better with her white skin and well-formed feature.

“Hero?”

Artpe was so taken aback that he mumbled to himself.

Somehow, the hero heard his words. Maetel let out a bright laugh as she replied.

“Yes. Let's go play being heroes!”

This was the day when Artpe died as a demon.

He was reborn as a 12 year old male human, who was the childhood friend of the hero.

Chapter 1

Im a Hero!?! (1)

It had been two days, since he was reincarnated as a human male child, This was when Artpe came to a decision.

“I have to kill the Demon King.”

It was a really fucked up situation, but he had to kill the Demon King.

Why?

The reason was obvious. A Demon King's 1st priority was to kill all of humanity.

Artpe was a human now!

Would he have been better being reborn into the Demon race? No way.

The reason why the bastard was trying to kill all the humans was the fact that the Demon King's Innate Ability didn't allow him to dominate over humans. His Innate Ability only worked on the Demon race, and the Demon King had been thorough in catching all the demons. He had put all the Demons under his rule.

Since the Demon King existed in the same era as him, there was no way he'll become free unless he killed the Demon King.

Artpe had lamented when he was confronted with this decision. He wanted to be alive to see the hopes and dreams of the future.

‘Why in the hell did I have to be sent back to the past! If I was born 3 years after the hero or the Demon King was killed, I could have lived in the countryside without any ambitions. I could have just lived, while I tended cows!’

He could somewhat guess at the mechanism behind his reincarnation. His Read All Creation had evolved into its second stage. He didn't know the exact cause, but he knew this was all related to his ability.

He always knew his ability was unusual, but he never expected it to be able to bend time and space. No, the fact that there even was a Step 2 to his Innate Ability was a surprise for him!

However, the problem he now faced was the fact that his Innate Ability had distorted not only time, but the cause-and-effect relationship of events.

“Artpe!”

The door opened in the same fashion as two days ago. A bright light entered into the hut, and Artpe already knew the name of the girl entering the hut.

“I knew you would come, ‘Maetel’.”

“You were waiting for me! I'm so happy!”

The girl let out a bright smile in front of Artpe. She looked very young, but he was sure that she was one of the heroes in his memories, who had invaded the Demon King's castle. He had also verified this fact through his Read All Creation ability, so it was irrefutable.

“Why would I wait for you? Just looking at you make me feel anxious.”

“Anxious?..... Ah, jeez~ Artpe~ ”

The 12 year old hero was under a false impression when she heard Artpe's words. She squirmed and twisted her body in embarrassment. Artpe groaned when he saw the young hero fall into a delusion.

During his past role as one of the Four Heavenly Kings of the Demon King's army, the Demon King had ordered Artpe to gather information about the hero. In truth, it was a task beneath even the weakest amongst the Four Heavenly Kings, but that fact wasn't important right now.

The important part was the fact that the past hero didn't have a childhood friend.

“Let's go play being heroes, Artpe!”

“I'm sorry, but I'm sick of both the heroes and the Demon King.”

“Then you can be one of the Demon King army's Four Heavenly Kings!”

“That is one thing I'll never do!”

Artpe pushed aside the hero, who came at him in a playful manner. He kept letting out a sigh. He had wished for a life where he wasn't entangled with the Demon King, so this time around he was entangled with the hero. If he had the opportunity to meet the goddess of fate, he would most definitely flip her off!

Instead of being entangled with the hero, he would have preferred to live life as the normal Villager A. Then he would be able to focus on his profession, while leaving all the problems of this world to the hero. He could just put his trust in the hero, since her unlimited growth potential would let her overcome everything.

If he was unlucky enough to chance upon the hero's party, he would just say, ‘If you follow down this road, you will come upon the Demon King's Castle!’ Or he would tell them, ‘Our town's population of wildcats have gotten out of control. Could you help us catch them?’

He would just tell them some half assed excuse to get rid of them!

“This world is already different from the past I knew’

To be precise, Artpe had reincarnated as the hero's childhood friend. From this point on, the future would be in flux. Even if he ran away from the hero right now, the changed timeline wouldn't revert back. It wasn't a realistic possibility.

“Eh-whew. Artpe is trying to play by himself again. Then I have no choice. I'll stick by your side.”

“No, I really don't need you right now. Could you leave me alone?”

“But I need Artpe.”

Artpe despaired. What the hell did he do before he became aware of his previous life's memories? Why was he in such a good relationship with the hero! It was so bad that even if he managed to run away, he worried the hero would track him down!

“You.....”

“Eh-heh-heh.”

The hero let out a simple and honest laugh as she sat next to Artpe. It seemed events weren't going to proceed in accordance to Artpe's wishes.

This was a problem. Artpe's biggest worry was the relationship he had with the hero.

A hero was literally a walking box of storm and calamity. Even the most peaceful town would be put in danger when the hero became involved. Moreover, anyone who encounters the hero becomes embroiled in the hero's business.

In the past, there was a very famous story about the hero taking every valuable item when passing through each town. The most insidious part about this story was the fact the townspeople had an irresistible urge to give whatever they possessed to the hero. If the hero fulfilled a request, one would have to give up a treasure as recompense!

So what would his life be like as the childhood friend of the hero!

‘No. I don't know how the future will unfold. This girl might not awaken to become a hero.’

If a Demon King existed, a hero always appeared. However, Artpe had reincarnated as a human, so the future had changed. It wasn't a certainty that Maetel would awaken as a hero.

“Still, I wouldn't bet on it.”

Maetel would become a hero, and as her childhood friend, he would get swept up in her business.

In truth, that scenario was the most likely one to come true. In this world, the most talented person was chosen to become the hero. Artpe had used his Read All Creation to verify the talent possessed by the 12 year old Maetel. She was so outstanding that it made one wonder if the gods made a mistake in creating her.

He followed this thread of logic to come to his previous conclusion.

He had to kill the Demon King.

“My life as a demon... No. My life as a human is really...”

Artpe wrapped his head with his hands as he despaired. Maetel consoled him.

“Hang in there, Artpe! We have to endure, and we have to live five times the life we have already lived!”

“Where did you learn such a phrase?”

“I learned it from Artpe.”

It seemed he wasn't a normal guy even before he recovered his memories! Artpe's head started to hurt more. Maetel, who didn't know his inner thoughts, kept smiling.

“I only want to live a quiet life.”

“You always say those words, Artpe.”

“However, the world won't leave me alone.”

“That is also one of your favorite phrases you like to speak.”

“It isn't really important how I got here. How should I proceed from now on... Mmmm?”

He grumbled as he started responding to Maetel when a flash of light illuminated the inside of his mind.

Until now, he had assumed that the future was distorted, because he had reincarnated as the hero's childhood friend. However, was that actually true?

In the past, Artpe had used his Read All Creation to track the hero's whereabouts. Of course, he also had a complete grasp of what developed in the human world.

Would everything he remembered change just because of Artpe's presence? He was only a single person.

‘There's no way that would happen.’

Yes. At best, an additional male child was born in a mountain village. There was no

way such an event would cause the war to be canceled or a king to be poisoned!

However, how could that be the only implication? He knew the location of legendary thief's grave. The grave held riches. He also knew the locations of the Archmage's ruin, Balrok's Nest, and Archmage Rain of Louin's Magic Tome. They would be in the same place as the locations in his memories!

"My god."

He finally realized the whole truth, and a shiver ran up his body. His Read All Creation ability allowed him to remember what had happened in the human world and the demon world. It didn't matter if a lot of event in his future would change. He still had many information that he could use to his advantage!

There were many riches, many magic, many skills and many hidden hunting grounds!

"If I can acquire all of this with her..."

"Ah, Artpe."

Maetel's cheeks turned red. Artpe had mumbled his words, and it seemed another big misunderstanding had occurred. However, Artpe was too excited to worry about it.

"If that happens, maybe....."

He'll be able to compress the development process of the hero, and she would be able to gain items that were never in the possession of her previous self. If he could let her gain everything he figured out with his Read All Creation ability, the killing of the Demon King might not be a problem!

If he could make that happen, he would be free! Moreover, he could use the position of being the hero's childhood friend to lead a peaceful life!

The future he could foresee was letting out a radiant golden light. Artpe suddenly stood up from his seat. Maetel also stood up.

"All right. Leave everything to me, hero."

"Hero? As expected, you do want to play hero!"

“I'm not talking about playing house with you. I've never been as serious as this moment in my life.”

“.....ah, all right.”

The hero's face had turned red, and she kept nodding her head.

“I'll leave everything to Artpe.”

“You just nodded your head. You can't take it back.”

“This is true for Artpe too! You can't back out of this!”

Artpe was satisfied with Maetel's answer. At this point in time, the two of them completely misunderstood what each of them were promising. Artpe was dreaming about a peaceful future, so he hadn't realized this fact.

“All right. Then you should head back for now. I'll have to be thorough in making a plan for us.”

“A plan... You are being very earnest about this. All right! I'll go wait patiently for you!”

Maetel turned around, and she opened the door to the hut. She was about to exit when she said, “Oh”, as if she had just remembered something. She called out towards Artpe.

“You do know what is happening in the afternoon, right? Baptism Ritual!”

“Baptism Ritual? Ah!”

When one was born into the Demon race, one possessed all of one's abilities from the start. Demons had to be ready to fight as soon as they were born. However, humans were different. Humans had to contact the gods through the priests, and a Class was given to each human. The Classes ranged from carpenter, farmer, adventurer, warrior, etc. A human's station in life was determined at that point. The humans call it the Baptism Ritual.

“What Class will I receive? I'm looking forward to it!”

“I'm also looking forward to it, but I could already guess what my Class is.”

“That's amazing, Artpe!”

There was limit on what Class one could acquire, and it depended on one's station in life, and one's ability. One cannot become a knight unless one was a noble. One cannot become the heir to the throne unless one was the son of a king. If one didn't have the ability to manipulate Mana, one couldn't become a magician.

Still, it didn't mean one couldn't escape an already chosen Class.....

Artpe smiled as he felt the unrefined Mana circulate around his body.

Was it because he was a Demon in the past? Currently, he was only a 12 year old child, yet he had a large reserve of Mana. Moreover, he could wield the Mana freely. Unless something went wrong, he would probably become a magician.

“You'll probably become a hero.”

“Hero? Of course, I do like to pretend and play at being a hero, but.....”

Maetel let out a timid laugh.

“Truthfully, there is one thing I want more than me being a hero.”

“Ah. Is that so?”

“I would love it if Artpe was able to become a hero!”

“Pffft.”

Artpe couldn't hold back his laughter when he heard those words.

“Yes. It would be hilarious if that happened.”

“Oh god. Please give guidance to this child's path!”

“Yeah yeah. I beg of you. ”

[You've earned the 'Hero' Class.]

“.....uh?”

When he really became a hero, Artpe could no longer laugh.

Chapter 2

Im a Hero!? (2)

“Hoo…….”

He had mapped out a golden plan to bring about a tranquil future for himself, but his plan went awry from the start. All the fault lie in the fact that Artpe was chosen to be a hero. The future in front of him was a confusing and chaotic mess.

“Why me!”

“This is all very splendid, Artpe! Isn’t it!”

Maetel stuck close to him, and she was all smiles. On top of her head, Artpe could see words that could be only seen with his eyes.

[Name : Maetel]

[Race : Human Female]

[Title : Hero]

[Level : 1]

[Strength : 8, Agility : 12, Stamina : 11, Magic Energy : 10]

“No matter how I think about this, this doesn’t make any sense…”

That’s right.

This time around two heroes were chosen.

“I had faith that Artpe would become a hero. Artpe is smart!”

“I believed ‘you’ would be the only one to become a hero.”

This was what happened in his previous life!

Maybe this was the 1,000 year anniversary of creation of this world, and this was some kind of a massive event where two heroes were given instead of one!

Yes. The fact that there were two heroes meant that the probability of success in killing the Demon King had gone up. That was a good thing.

Still, why did he have to one of the heroes! The fact that he was the hero's childhood friend was already dangerous enough, yet now his situation had worsened!

"Please wait a moment. We'll contact the palace, and we'll take both of you to the capital"

"Palace! Are we really going to a palace!?"

"Yes. I'll be back soon."

"Yes!"

".....uh?"

Why were there two heroes? Why did he become a hero!

He wrapped his hands around his head as he faced the nightmare-like reality in front of him. When he raised his head, he discovered the priest in charge of the Baptism Ritual moving quickly towards the exit. The sight evoked an ominous feeling within him. Artpe narrowed his eyes as he asked Maetel a question.

"What did he just say?"

"He'll contact the palace, and we'll be taken to the capital!"

"The capital!?"

"Yes, the capital! It is a shiny city!"

Maetel's voice was filled with happiness and delight. She sounded super sweet. Artpe heard her overly sweet words, and it caused his expression to sour in real time!

In his previous life, he clearly remembered what happened to the hero when she went to the capital. He shouldn't be wallowing in despair as he stood by doing nothing! If they didn't get out of this situation, they will be ruined!

Artpe decided not to ruminate over his situation right now. He could dwell on his own misfortune at a later time. The important thing right now...

They had to run away!

"Capital! Palace! Being a hero is really great!"

"You are completely mistaken. The palace isn't as grand a place to be as you think."

Why did humans treat heroes well? They wanted to trot out the heroes to face the Demon King. It didn't matter if other humans gave them nice clothes and food. When the time came, they would push the two of them out into the streets. They would expect the heroes to kill the Demon King. Basically, the two of them were akin to domesticated pigs that would be fattened and eaten later.

"Well, let's talk about the problem we face right now. "

"Pork is too expensive to eat!"

"The quality of the fodder they are trying to feed us stinks! It is pathetic!"

Did she understand what Artpe was trying to convey? When she heard his words, her pupils shook for the first time. It was as if the world was about to fall on her head. She asked in a serious manner.

"Wa. The food at the palace isn't tasty?"

"It is the worst."

Artpe was firm with his words. It had already been several hundred years since the fight between a hero and a Demon King. Of course, the palace had a manual in regards to how to develop a hero. However, it was very outdated! It was trash! Even the common soldiers of the Demon Army would ridicule the manual if they saw it!

'In truth, the hero's development was delayed, because she followed their manual.'

Maetel's potential was remarkable. In only a year, her level had increased from level 200 to level 374. Even if the Demon King continued to provide a constant stream of fodder, her growth rate was unbelievable.

Such an amazing hero had lived in the palace for several years, yet her growth rate had been absurdly low. If the Demon King hadn't paid attention to her, she would have never reached the Demon King's castle!

Therefore, if the two heroes were dragged into the palace, the only thing waiting for them was a terrible loss! It would be game over for them!

"Humans are the biggest enemies of other humans. I want you to remember this, Maetel."

"Ah, all right. Humans are the biggest enemies of other humans... The food at the palace tastes bad..."

This was the moment when the hero realized humanity was her enemy.

"So what should we do, Artpe?"

"Don't worry about it. I thought of a way to nurture... I know how we'll develop ourselves. I know things are a bit messed up right now, but... Tsk. It can't be helped. Let's do this my way."

His original plan was to gather all the skills and magic in this world. He planned on giving it all to Maetel. However, he had also become a hero now. Their enemy didn't have a single target anymore. The target had split into two, and Artpe didn't want to die. This was why Artpe had no choice, but to come to this conclusion.

"From now on, you'll learn about weapons. I'll learn magic. The rest... We'll appropriately split it up between the two of us, and learn it."

"Yes!"

A hero was able to learn skills and magic from all Classes. This special characteristic made the Hero Class a cheat Class. Moreover, there were a good number of unique skills and special skills hidden around the world, and they could only be mastered by the hero Class.

Normally, it was foolish to learn magic and weapons at the same time. It slowed one's development in both fields. However, the hero had to swallow the bitter pill of learning both fields, since the hero was pushed to learn all the skills and special moves that could only be learned by the hero...

'However, there are two heroes now.'

The most fundamental problem had been solved. The two of them could choose one's specialty field ahead of time. Each skill they gained could be maxed out. This would simplify their plan on how they would dispose the Demon King!

".....this is hogwash! Ooh-ahhhhh! Why am I a hero!"

"Artpe. A hog doesn't wash itself!"

"Don't undercut me so coldly at a time like this!"

This wasn't his original plan! He planned on developing Maetel into a great hero, and he planned on eating the crumbs off the table from the back! He would have to fight the bone chillingly strong Demon King! Shit!

"Ooh-ahhhhhhhh. Please tell me this is all a dream!"

"This is really like a dream, Artpe. Artpe and I are heroes... Together..."

Maetel's idiotic reaction didn't allow Artpe to escape from reality. If he dropped the ball, the Private A of the Demon King's army might be able to kill them! Artpe let out a big sigh as he flicked Maetel's forehead.

"Ouch."

"You have to get ahold of yourself from now on. A hero becomes the center of attention for the humans, but at the same time, the hero becomes the target of every demon within the Demon race."

"It's all right. I'll protect Artpe!"

"Yes. I like that you are courageous."

He was a little bit late in realizing this, but... This girl was a bit of an idiot.

How was she able to learn magic and healing spells? After much consideration, he realized Maetel had only used her sword in his previous life. He hadn't seen her use anything else.

Even as he lost, he had thought the hero was acting cool when she held back from using any magic. However, Artpe was mistaken. The hero had been an idiot, and she hadn't been able to handle any difficult magic!

"Eh-whew. Maybe this is for the best. It seems the gods are pretty smart."

It was said a diamond on a dunghill is still a diamond. Artpe had the experience of living as a Demon, so he was more adept at manipulating magic compared to most humans. He was made into being a hero, and at the very least, he was better at using magic than Maetel. This meant their chances of beating the Demon King had gone up.

If he didn't have this idea to cling onto, his stomach would be churning from pain.

"I reincarnated for nothing……."

"Huh? Reincarnated?"

"It's nothing. Let's get ready to escape."

"Escape?"

When Maetel made a retort, Artpe didn't say anything. He just pointed out the window.

"Artpe! Let's talk for a little bit!"

"We gave you bread yesterday!"

"I have an item left behind by your father, Maetel! Why don't you come out here for a brief moment.?"

This was a hut where Artpe lived by himself. This was no where near the center of the village, yet the people of the village were all gathered in front of his hut. It was a scary sight.

"Ah. He said my father left an item behind! I'll be right back."

“They are liars. Stay by my side.”

“Yes!”

Artpe stopped Maetel from getting up. She almost fell for the most basic trick. He let out a sigh. He would have to turn away the people, and he would have to escape the village with Maetel. His immediate future looked bleak. At that moment, Maetel’s naive voice asked a question.

“So why are so many people gathered outside? Normally, they are very chilly towards Artpe and I.”

“Since we are heroes, they probably want to create a tie with us at all cost. Still, they are only level 1 starter village people ABCD.”

Artpe was an orphan of unknown origin. Maetel had lost her mother when she was young, and her father was a traveling merchant.

The villagers weren’t heartless enough to let the two die. They helped the children get by, but they were considered to be a drain on their resources. This was why the villagers had treated them as if they were undesirables.

However, the two of them had suddenly become heroes!

Until now, the people of this village had treated them poorly, and those memories were flashing through their minds. This was why they had all gathered here to leave a positive memory behind in the two children’s minds.

“If they had something useful, I would take it, but...”

There was no hidden treasure or skill in this village. He had checked with his Read All Creation ability.

Basically, he had nothing to gain from the villagers. This town had no special characteristics aside the fact that the heroes were born here. This was basically a quintessential starter’s village!

“Nothing good will come from getting involved with them. Even if we received and completed a request, they probably would give us some grass as a reward.”

“I’m good at eating grass. When I was young, father taught me which grass I could eat.”

“I’m not going to eat grass. I’m not a cow. Are you a cow?”

“No!”

“Then you shouldn’t eat it from now on.”

“Yes!”

He didn’t care about the worries of the villagers. They didn’t interest Artpe. The fact that he was a hero now was annoying, so he didn’t feel the need to get involved in other people’s business! The only things he needed was money, level, skills and spells!

“This is why we have to run away. If we stay put, we might be dragged away to the castle.”

“I also don’t want food that tastes bad!”

Maetel let out an energetic shout as if she agreed with Artpe. However, she soon asked a question in low spirits.

“If father comes back to find me missing, he’ll be sad. If I go stay at the castle, I can contact him. I can’t do that if I go with you.”

“You are sharp in regards to some topics... Well... Mmmm.”

At this point in time, Maetel’s father had died in a remote part of the continent. Artpe had been in charge of investigating her, so he was sure of it.

However, he couldn’t just tell her that her father was dead, because it was so in his previous life! Artpe’s existence might have changed Maetel’s father’s fate, but that possibility was very low. However, he didn’t feel the need to attack Maetel mentally at this point in time.

This was why he made up a reasonable-sounding excuse.

“We’ll leave behind a letter. Your father knows that you are close with me. He’ll probably come looking for you at this hut.”

“Artpe. I know how to read letters, but I don’t know how to write.....”

“It’s all right. I know human... I know how to read and write the Kingdom Language.”

“That’s amazing!”

When Artpe raised his right hand, a blue light appeared at the end of his index finger. This couldn’t be called magic. It was the most basic mana technique called Mana Manifestation. It was possible to engrave letters into the wood using the hot mana. Maetel’s eyes became brighter. Artpe grinned as he confirmed something with her.

“Does your father know the Kingdom Language?”

“Of course!”

“All right, hero. Do you have anything you want to tell your father?”

“Yes, I do! So...”

Artpe transcribed all of Maetel’s words on the wall of the hut. He let out a sigh as he stepped back. He thought this was pointless, but if he could keep her morale up, it was worth it.

‘I’ve gone through the trouble of doing this. You should come back alive, and search this hut out.’

He grumbled as he gave his wish, and he grabbed Maetel’s hand.

Kyhhh!

Maetel let out a bashful sound, but he ignored it.

“Let’s run away.”

“Y... yes!”

“Aht, Artpe!”

“Maetel!”

The two of them charged out of the hut's door in an energetic manner. The villagers rushed forward. Artpe didn't know when the priest would be coming back, so he didn't have the time to deal with the villagers. Artpe chose the weakest looking villager. He glared at the Villager D as he spoke.

"We have to go to the restroom."

"I... I'm sorry."

Village person D backed off. Villager A, B, C and E followed D's example as they also backed off!

This was the moment he had been waiting for. He ran as he pulled Maetel behind him. Villager D looked at the children's back. It seemed the two of them really had to go to the restroom.

However, the two children was never seen again. They didn't return to the village.

The heroes succeeded in running away.

Chapter 3

Im a Hero!? (3)

“The human body is weak.”

Artpe had a new revelation. The price of this new revelation was a scrape on his knee.

“Artpe was always bad at running. Eh-whew. I knew you were running too hard.”

The priest was probably back after contacting the palace. The priest would immediately try to find them, so they had to be far away as possible. However, Artpe couldn't run properly, since he suffered an injury. This was why Maetel was helping him walk. He was slowing down the hero. If he was still one of the Four Heavenly Kings, he would have considered his own actions to be a meritorious deed!

“This isn't the time to.....”

“Artpe?”

Artpe had extended threads of Mana from his body, and his face crumpled when he felt a vibration through the threads. There were beings born from a spring of evil nearby. Basically, monsters were nearby...

There were three of them. These monsters were living in a forest near humans, who weren't very vigilant. As expected of monsters living in such a region, they were naturally occurring level 3 goblins. These were monsters that always showed up in stories that had heroes, knights or magicians as main characters. The main characters always defeat these monsters in the most miserable way possible for the monsters. They were the monsters of misfortune, who bowed out early from the story.

Of course, even if the goblins were very weak, Artpe and Maetel had just left their town. They were mere level 1s, so the goblins were stronger than them. If Artpe and Maetel had moved through the normal route, they would have faced slimes or creatures weaker than squirrels. They could have raised their levels by hunting them instead of facing goblins!

‘Fortunately, I dispersed my threads of Mana. Of course, it would have been better if I possessed Search or Barrier type magic!’

Level was everything in this world. If one had low level, one was low on Mana. There were restrictions placed on Skills and Spells, because one’s soul was of low quality. One could attack an enemy’s weak spot using a Sliding Tackle skill, which was sharper than an attack with a knife, yet one would have a hard time delivering a critical hit. On top of that, one wouldn’t be able to equip oneself with good equipments!

“Maetel. You should stop helping me, and...”

“Huh? I can feel a strange energy.”

Artpe had been about to warn Maetel, but she mumbled to herself before he could. Her pretty face frowned.

Artpe could see Maetel’s ability change in real time.

[Maetel]

[Level 1]

[Detection Lv1]

“I can feel it more clearly now, Artpe. I’m pretty sure there are beings coming towards us.”

“.....ah, yes. I was about to tell you the same thing. ”

Of course, there were also geniuses, who learned high quality Skills, irrespective of their levels. This was what had happened to the blonde haired girl in front of him! She was a damned genius!

He let out a string of curses in a low voice, and he decided to look at this in a positive light. His only ally was a genius.

“They are goblins. They are all level 3. If it’s a one on one battle, it might be a fair fight. However, there are three of them.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll protect Artpe.”

Her words were very heroic!

However, she was wearing shabby clothes. It probably had a Defense of 0. It might even have a negative defense by the look of it. She had no other equipments. The girl spoke such words, while she clenched her dirty hands into a fist. It amplified the worry he felt.

“Still, you can't fight them with empty hands. It is unreasonable, so please be patient.”

“Yes.”

Artpe let go of Maetel's helping hands. He limped around as he quickly searched his surrounding. He could see the composition of the world, and the information was pouring in through his eyes. He concentrated his efforts in finding the most sharp or hard item he could find. Fortunately, his efforts were immediately rewarded.

“Hoo. This should be fine.”

[Burning Branch]

[A trace amount of naturally occurring Mana has hardened the fibers and bark of the branch. It has the potential to be used as a burning weapon. It'll break after several swings.]

Sometimes there were artifacts that were naturally formed in nature. It was ungainly compared to a crafted weapon, but it was good enough to be used as a stopgap weapon. He put the item into Maetel's hands as he spoke.

“Two is coming diagonally from the left, so you should guard that side.”

“Huh? This branch feels a bit strange. I can feel a hot, yet comfortable feeling from it.”

“What?”

Artpe observed Maetel. Sure enough, he saw the newly updated information.

[Maetel]

[Level - 1]

[Mana Sensitivity Lv1]

“...yes. I see.”

“I don’t know what just happened, but was it something good?”

“Of course. This is the attainment of a warrior.”

This wasn’t something a normal warrior could gain. This was the attainment of a high rank warrior! Artpe didn’t know how many skills she could awaken by herself. He decided not to be surprised from now on. He picked up an ordinary rock, and he turned around.

His knee was aching, but he ignored the pain. He focused on imbuing Mana into the rock. The only thing he could do right now was to manipulate his Mana.

Mana was basically pure energy. When he imbued his Mana into this very plain rock, it would become a useful weapon that he could throw once.

Fortunately, Artpe had a ridiculous amount of Mana considering he was level 1... There was so much that he wondered if his status as a hero had a causal effect. He had put in enough Mana to fill the rock, yet he still had plenty left.

The rock was filled with magic, and it started to emit a blue light. If he left it be, the Mana would slowly bleed out. However, if he threw it, it would cause a weak explosion. It was enough to kill a level 3 goblin.

“Artpe?”

“I told you there were three, right? Don’t worry about the one coming towards us from our rear. You just focus on the ones coming from the front.”

“You even know where the monsters are coming from. Artpe is amazing!”

“Look towards the front.”

“Yes!”

If one of the bastards had a long distance weapon, they would have to run away. However, this was a forest in the boondocks. This was a novice zone where goblins

weren't allowed to hold any advanced weapons.

As expected, it didn't take too long for a laughing goblin to push through the brush. The goblins weren't equipped better than them. They just had sturdy looking clubs.

[Goo-heh-heh. You guys look tasty! Guehk!]

"Die!"

There was no way he would allow a level 3 small fish pontificate in front of him! When the goblin assigned to Artpe came into range, he quickly threw the rock. The rock flew true, and the goblin's head exploded. The goblin fell over backwards. It was a one shot kill.

[Kee... kee-eek!?!]

[Weak humans!?!]

"Hyahhhhhp!"

When their comrade in charge of the ambush died in such a preposterous manner, the goblins were taken aback! At that moment, the hero charged. Unlike her title as a hero, she had used a cowardly tactic by waiting for an opening!

"I feel as if everything will work out if I swing this!"

"Countless gamblers ruined themselves by trusting their instincts!"

"Hoo-ahhhhhp!"

[Ggoo-ehhhhhhk!]

However, unlike Artpe worries, the wooden branch swung by Maetel fell with exquisite strength and speed. It impacted on the goblin's arm. The goblin dropped it club, and it fell over as it screamed in pain.

A level 3 monster was defeated by a level 1 hero! This was shameful; event for the entire race of goblins.

[Maetel]

[Level - 1]

[Swordsmanship Lv1]

“Artpe. Somehow I feel stronger!”

“Ah. I know. ”

Until now, Maetel had only swung a branch during her roleplay as a hero. She didn't have any real battle experience, yet she learned swordsmanship so easily.

Still, Swordsmanship wasn't as impressive as the Mana Sensitivity!

Artpe gave an apathetic reply as he picked up another rock.

From just one swing of the branch, Maetel had earned courage and skill. She bravely attacked the remaining goblin.

“Scary monsters! Don't torment Artpe!”

[Kwahhhhk. It is a scary human! Ggoo-ehhhhk!]

This strike was much stronger than before. She was only a level 1, yet she possessed Mana Sensitivity. Maetel instinctively brought out the heat from within the wooden branch. She burned the goblin's club, and she hit the goblin's head square in the head!

The goblin couldn't resist against the terrible pain, and it died.

It was hard to tell which one was the scary monster!

[Maetel]

[Level 2]

[Mana Control Lv1]

“Ooh. Oooh.”

When the fire was brought out from the wooden branch, it consumed all the mana contained within the branch. It turned into ash in Maetel's hand, and the ash was

dispersed by the wind. Somehow, it was a sad sight for her.

“I really killed them.”

It was as if Maetel had poured out all her energy. She sat in place as she looked down at her hands.

It was a very short fight, but she had never experienced something so powerful. She had went back and forth between the boundaries of life and death. She had ended lives with her hands! She wouldn't be able to forget this shock easily.

Artpe also knew what she was going through. He understood it.

However...

“Artpe. I... I won?”

“No.”

Artpe gave a cold reply, and he threw the rock he had pick up a moment ago. In a short amount of time, the rock had taken in a lot of Artpe's Mana. The rock brushed near Maetel as it flew by like the wind. Before it could swing its club towards Maetel, the goblin's head exploded.

Maetel saw the goblin's body stumble to the ground. She finally became aware of its presence.

“Kyahhhhk!”

“You haven't won until all your enemies are killed. You should keep that in mind.”

“.....I forgot.”

The goblin she attacked first had only suffered a broken arm from her first strike. It had dropped its club, yet it had remained alive. Maetel had forgotten about the first goblin when she faced the other goblin. On top of that, she had been intoxicated by the fact that she had killed a goblin. The battle hadn't ended, yet she had been out of it!

Maetel was looking at Artpe blankly. He spoke icily towards her.

“Wake up, Maetel. We are no longer children, who live within the fences of a village.”

“Artpe…….”

Other 12 year old girls could act like this right now, but a hero didn't have that luxury. Even if Maetel's goodwill towards him decreased, he wanted her to have a mean streak.

The hero in his previous life was too soft.

She had been softer than a cheese matured for half a year! Instead of giving her a curriculum for the gifted, he needed to make a hero, who was cold and spiteful!

“……is too cool.”

“Huh?”

However, his intentions was off by a little bit. Maetel's cheeks were flushed as she ran towards Artpe. She grabbed both his hands, and she started yelling excitedly as she jumped around.

“Artpe is too cool! You really are like a hero!”

“You are the hero! Ah, I guess I'm also a hero now!”

Even as he said it, his words gave him goosebumps. Artpe couldn't think of anyone else in this world, who was as unsuitable for the role of hero as him! On the other hand, it seemed Maetel viewed Artpe as a cool hero.

“I want to be like Artpe!”

“No, you won't.”

Artpe spoke with a serious face. Maetel's spirit was finally dampened a little bit.

“Anyways, you should never put down your guard until all your enemies are dead. Even fallen enemies should be checked. I want you to double check even if the enemy's throat was cut. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I understand. I'll bear it in mind!……. So the enemy doesn't die even if its throat is

cut?”

Artpe clicked his tongue at Maetel’s naive question. It wouldn’t be called a monster if it died so easily!

“I’m not sure about these small fishes, but later on, there are bastards, who survive, even after being cut into 17 pieces. The criteria for finding out if a monster is dead is to use Mana.”

“Mana?”

“You’ve handled Mana not too long ago, and you’ve also acquired skills... I’ll teach it to you slowly.”

“Yes!”

“However, there is something else I have to teach you first.”

Artpe approached a dead goblin, and he tapped the corpse. Suddenly, a yellow coin fell from its body. When she saw this, Maetel’s eyes turned round.

“Why do monsters have money!?”

“That is a very good question.”

Artpe kicked the remaining two goblins, and he picked up the coins. He let out a fresh smile as he spoke.

“I don't know the answer either!”

This was the moment when the hero learned of Looting.

Chapter 4

Im a Hero!? (4)

“Stay still, Artpe.”

“Hey. Stop right there. Don’t come over here. Hey, hey!”

Artpe was facing the biggest threat of his lifetime. The identity of this threat was a paste made from a handful of grass. She held it in her hand.

“You’ll get better soon if I can put this on you.”

“Stop lying! There is no way I’ll get better by applying such a dirty... Ah.”

[Maetel]

[Level - 2]

[Medicine Lv4]

[Care Grass]

[The grass works against all types of wounds, but its effects are weak. If the grass is made into a paste by combining liquid, its recuperative power is increased slightly.]

Maybe it could really heal his wound.

When that thought ran through his mind, Artpe immediately calmed down. This was his mistake. Unlike the previous incarnation of herself, the current hero had learned how to attack an opening. In a flash, she darted in, and she put the grass paste on his knee!

“Ooh-ahhhhhhhhk!”

“Just be still and get treated by me!”

“Ooh-ahhhh... It really is getting better!”

She hadn't put much effort into searching through the thicket. After she pulled out the grass, she spat on it before mashing it.

The pain disappeared in a flash after the paste was applied!

Artpe was taken aback by this unexpected aptitude the hero possessed. She preened as she stuck out her still flat chest.

“My dad taught me about the different types of grasses. There are grasses you can eat, and of course, there are the ones that can treat wounds. There are even a grass that can recover your energy. He also taught me about which grasses are dangerous to eat.”

“I ignored you when you said you ate grass before, but now it sounds as if your words were predictive.....”

“Let's rest for a little bit until the medicine soaks in. Ah. Before we do that.....”

Maetel found a patch of grass nearby, and she pulled out the wide leaved grasses. She wiped it off on her sleeve. Then she wrapped the wide leaves around the wound administered with the paste. She tied it loosely.

She had looked fiendish when fighting the goblins, but in this light, she showed her feminine side. If he was a normal boy, he would have fallen for her at this point in time. Of course, Artpe was able to sidestep this issue. The number one cause of death for the Four Heavenly Kings had been honey traps. He was well-informed regarding this issue, so his heart didn't beat faster at all.

“Oopsy daisy. It's all done.”

“.....thank you.”

“This is nothing compared to what Artpe has done for me!”

Maetel had a big smile on her face as she sat next to Artpe. After the battle with the goblins had ended, they had decided to recover from the fatigue caused by their first battle. They rested on top of a big boulder that was nearby.

“What I did for you.....”

Artpe felt guilty at Maetel's words, so he let out a bitter laugh.

Truthfully, he had mixed feelings about all of this. Was he really the same person as the version of himself, who had grown up with Maetel? Why did Artpe have no memory of the time before he regained his memories?

"Are you tired, Artpe? I'll let you use my lap as a pillow. Why don't you sleep even if it is for a brief time?"

"...no."

Artpe faced the angelic and kind face of Maetel. He felt awkward facing her, so he surreptitiously turned his gaze towards the sky. The glow of the setting sun was slowly spreading across the sky.

They didn't have any time to waste.

"My wound is fine. Let's get up now. It'll be extremely cold and dark once the night comes."

"What should we do?"

The two heroes were still too young and weak. It was risky for them to spend the whole night within the forest. Be that as it may, they couldn't just blindly go back to the town.

What would be their best option right now?

Artpe let out a gentle laugh as he revealed the answer.

"We can go into a Dungeon."

"...what?"

Maetel answered back with a question.

For the first time, since he was reincarnated, Artpe spoke words worthy of a hero.

"I'm saying we should go clear a Dungeon!"

Dungeons were a scary place where it was teeming with monsters and traps. However, at the end of the Dungeons, there was always the prospect of acquiring sweet rewards. This was why adventurers were lured into the Dungeons. Some called the Dungeons as being a gift from the gods. Others called it the temptation from the devil. There were even some, who called it was a prank pulled off by the Demon King.

“I like to refer to Dungeons as being rich mines.”

“Artpe is amazing!”

It was unbelievably hard to find rewards within the Dungeons.

There were cases where one was able to avoid all the traps, but when one reached the last room, it was revealed that the treasure was hidden in one of the traps one had already passed. There were times when the last boss was killed, but it was revealed that the last boss was the treasure. Then there were cases where the last boss didn't turn out to be the actual boss. The adventurer was awakened, in the course of fight monster, to become the last boss by being inflicted by poisons and curses. The world was overflowing with such stories!

At this point, it was clear that a god's nature could be as twisted as the Demon King.

Or were they the two sides of the same coin?

On the other hand, Artpe possessed the Read All Creation ability. He could pierce through all lies to see the truths. Nothing could deceive Artpe's eyes. Artpe's possessed an ability that would allow him to find all the hidden Dungeons, and it wouldn't be difficult for him to acquire the hidden treasures within the Dungeons!

‘Of course, in my previous life, I used this amazing ability for the benefit of the Demon King...’

Just the thought of that point made Artpe grind his teeth. If he had been able to take just a 20 percent cut of what he earned from those countless Dungeons, he would have been able to take care of 30 generations of his descendants!

“It'll be different this time around. All right. I'm going to work a little bit harder, so I can enjoy a peaceful life as a dairy farmer.”

“I'm not sure what you are talking about, but let's both work harder!”

Artpe knew about a Dungeon near the village where the hero was born. To be precise, there was exactly one Dungeon inside the forest near the country village. It was fitting, since that village had nothing.

From the start, he had thought about visiting this Dungeon, while they were running away. This was why they had been heading in this direction from the moment they came out of the village. It was going as planned. The Dungeon appeared not much later.

“...is it here?”

“Yes.”

When Maetel saw the entrance to the Dungeon, she had an odd expression on her face.

“Do we have to go into such a strange place? Isn’t this a burial ground?”

“All Dungeon entrances are like this. It was as if all the makers of Dungeons made a friendly agreement by losing their collective minds.”

Aside from burial grounds, there were several thousand year old trees, natural lakes formed within a cave and a ruined house inside a town. These were the popular spots for Dungeons.

These were very obvious and suspicious locations. However, these spots weren’t investigated unless the hero or Artpe discovered it. He had always wondered why it was like that. However, that issue didn’t matter now.

“I don’t want to go in there..... My dad said we shouldn’t disturb the rest of the dead.”

“Your father did a very good job in educating you.”

Up until now, Maetel had meekly followed Artpe’s words. This was the first time she had pushed back. Well, it was true that the hero from his past life never visited this Dungeon either.

After being chosen as a hero, she had been dragged immediately into the palace. She might have always had an aversion to burial grounds, but that didn’t matter any more. There was only one important fact right now. She ‘must’ go into this Dungeon.

This was why Artpe spoke with a stern voice.

“If we don’t go in here, we’ll be dragged back into the palace.”

“I like tasteless food even less! I also don’t like the cold. Woo, woo...”

“Well, are you going to go in?”

“... yes.”

The sun had set all the way, and their surrounding was getting colder. They didn’t have the time to dawdle. Maetel looked as if she was about to cry, but she followed Artpe. She had no choice, but to enter the Dungeon.

“Huh?”

However, when he actually entered the Dungeon, Maetel tilted her head in confusion.

“This isn’t a grave?”

Maetel had expected to see a coffin with a dead body within. She had expected cold brick walls with hidden bats and long spiderwebs. The sight that greeted them was a square room, and the floor was covered with brown soil.

When she turned around, she saw the stairway heading outside. Maetel was sure she had descended stone steps, yet unbeknownst to her, it had changed into stairs made out of dirt!

“Artpe, Artpe!”

Maetel’s eyes turned round, and she grabbed Artpe’s dirty sleeve. He had somewhat expected such a reaction from Maetel. Artpe smirked.

“Dungeons are all like this. So what do you think? Are you still cold?”

“No, I’m not cold at all... Huh? Why is that?”

When the hero realized the abnormal condition around her, she became slightly confused!

Artpe gave a short explanation to her.

“Dungeons are a form of pocket dimensions. You should think of it as a space disengaged from the outside world.”

“What is a pocket dimension?”

“The concept of a pocket dimension was first introduced in the year 728 according to the Continent Calendar. A demon named ‘Nanarai Bodra’ set up an experiment where the density of Mana within a limited space was pushed past the maximum permissible amount...”

“It’s over my head!”

Maetel raised one hand, and she yelled out in a spirited manner. Artpe had already expected such a reaction from her. He let out a benevolent smile as he asked her a question.

“Which part don’t you understand?”

“There’s too much... You should explain what the Continent Calendar is first.”

“All right. Let’s lay that aside for now.”

Artpe gave up on giving her an explanation. He was the one at fault for trying to explain a concept of magic to an idiot.

“Just accept that such places exists, and the Dungeons occupies that space.”

“Yes. All right!”

If she was going to gloss over everything, she shouldn’t have asked for an explanation!

“We’ll sleep here today. Since we are at the Dungeon entrance, the monsters won’t come near here. Moreover, no one will be able to find and enter this Dungeon. We can relax and sleep.”

“Yes. All right.”

He had said those words, but he prepared for the unexpected. He used his fingers to spread several threads of Mana over the Dungeon’s entrance, stairway and the doorway located on the other side of the room. It would allow him to be aware of

external threats beforehand, and it would give him some time to prepare for it. This was supposed to be an impossible task for a normal level 2 hero, but Artpe was able to pull it off.

Maetel watched Artpe work. Her eyes were shining relentlessly.

“Artpe is really incredible. There isn’t a thing you don’t know. You are great at everything except exercise. You are kind... Moreover, you are a hero!”

“You are a hero too.”

“I... I like being a hero, but in truth, I wouldn’t have minded if I hadn’t become a hero.”

Artpe finally remembered the words spoken by Maetel in the morning. She most definitely said there was something she wanted to be more than being a hero.

She had role played at being a hero everyday. He knew she loved being a hero. So what was she referring to when she said there was something she wanted more than being a hero?

Artpe mused over it when he turned to look at Maetel in alarm.

“Did you perhaps want to become the Demon King instead of a hero!?”

“No way!”

“You should most definitely not become one of the Four Heavenly Kings. It isn’t worth it.”

“I’m not talking about that!”

Maetel’s face had turned red as she fumed. Her anger pretty much wiped away the fear she felt for the Dungeon and the future. Artpe smiled for the first time, and he gently patted her head.

“I already know, you dummy. Whatever you want to be, you should keep it safe within your heart. When the Demon King is dead, you’ll be free.”

“Free...?”

A hero only existed, because there was a Demon King in existence. When the Demon King disappears, the Hero Class would vanish too.

Then the hero would be able to acquire a new Class.

“That day will come, so you should safeguard your dream. You shouldn’t forget about it. I will help you achieve it.”

“Dream... Do you really think I’ll be able to fulfil my dream?”

“Of course.”

He didn’t know what her dreams was. However, the dream was probably something she can realize after the death of the Demon King. Artpe nodded his head vigorously, and Maetel’s face visibly brightened.

“All right. I’ll try harder from now on! I’ll do whatever it takes!”

“Yes. Anyways, it is time for us to sleep.”

“Yes! Sleep well, Artpe!”

“You sleep well too.”

He had succeeded in motivating the hero.

Now she would be an active participant in moving forward!

Artpe let out a pleased smile. He was able to turn the tide of Maetel reluctance, and his plan was on track now.

His expression was akin to a farmer waiting for his harvest.

If he knew what Maetel was dreaming about, Artpe wouldn’t have been able to make such a contented expression. He had always been the lowest ranked of the Four Heavenly Kings, because he had a habit of not catching the important developments.

This was how the two heroes slept safely within the Dungeon on their first night out.

Chapter 5

Dungeon with Death (1)

On the next day, the two of them were able to safely open their eyes. Artpe had been inwardly worried about a highly skilled adventurer or a thief, who could neutralize his perception, catching them by surprise. However, a refreshing morning arrived without the need for Artpe to use his contingency plan 1, 2, 3 and 4. Of course, they were in a Dungeon, so they couldn't check whether it was light outside!

"Good morning, Artpe!"

"I don't know if it is morning yet, and I also don't know if it is a good one, but hello."

When Maetel opened her eyes, she had confirmed that Artpe was sleeping safely next to her. She let out a bright smile before she took stock of herself. Her eyes widened in surprise.

"Wow. We slept on floor, yet my body feels really great."

"The Mana inside a Dungeon is extremely active. It has a positive effect on one's vitals. However, we aren't the only living being in this place, and that is a problem."

Most monster, who entered a Dungeon, became much stronger. Of course, this increased the EXP one could gain. Still, it was scary to face these fortified monsters. This was why most adventurers and mercenaries was reluctant to enter a Dungeon. In truth, if one wanted to live a long life, it was best not to enter a Dungeon.

"Is this why you insisted on entering the Dungeon? Since we've slept and refreshed ourselves, can't we just head out?"

"We could. However, the soldiers dispatched from the palace would have expanded their search radius by now. If we go out right now, we'll be caught. We'll be dragged back into the palace."

"I don't like tasteless food!"

She could deal with wearing shoddy clothes, and not being able to sleep. However, she wanted to avoid not being able to eat good food at all cost. There were tears in Maetel's eyes as she shouted those words. Artpe nodded his head in satisfaction, and he handed her the leather waterskin.

"All right. After we drink some water, let's work hard to catch the monsters in here. By the time we are able to go out again, we'll be stronger. When we exit the Dungeon, we'll be able to easily evade the soldiers pursuing us."

This was the cheapest part about being a hero. Maetel had been a normal child only a day ago. Before she became a hero, she had merely been the leader of a group of children, who she played with. If things continued as they were progressing right now, she would be more skillful than the soldiers that were being killed like flies in the current war. She would be able to look down upon them!

There was a common saying within the Demon world. Yesterday's defeated hero will kill you tomorrow. Of course, the idiots within the Demon world ignored this saying, and they were killed and looted by the hero like clock-work. The biggest problem was the chef...

The Demon King was the biggest idiot amongst them!

"Do we have to fight those weird goblins again, Artpe?"

"No, we'll be fighting something much weirder. They are also stronger."

"Heeek!"

When she thought about the fight against the goblins yesterday, she shrank into herself.

However, Artpe had seen her remarkably learn four skills at once in yesterday's battle. He thought about how she looked yesterday, and he gravely nodded his head.

"You are capable of fighting opponents that are 10 levels above you. If you aren't careless, you'll be able to win easily, so don't worry too much about it. I'm also capable to a certain extent."

He most definitely felt the difference in yesterday's battle with the goblins. When Artpe was part of the Demon race, it didn't matter how great an ability he had possessed. He had a hard time distinguishing himself with his limited talent. Now he

was born as a human, and he had acquired the Hero Class. His situation had changed drastically.

“In the Demon world, there are no weak monsters like this.....”

“You even know about the Demon world. Artpe is amazing!”

“I read about it from a book... a book.”

The monsters from the Demon world were inherently outstanding at Mana detection, and they possessed a high Mana resistance. If one manifested Mana to attack those types of monsters, it wouldn't work. Yesterday, Artpe had infused a portion of his Mana into a rock, and he had thrown it. He also used threads of Mana to detect the approach of his enemies. These methods would have never work against the monsters from the Demon world.

However, he was in the realm of the humans now. There were countless monsters here that could be killed using such simple methods. He didn't have to level up, and acquire proper magic spells. Any magic spells that dealt with direct manipulation of magic could be mimicked with his control over Mana. He would be able to create a similar effect!

“Wow. Can all magicians do that?”

“They can, but they don't bother using it.”

The reason being it looked cooler to chant a spell, and the destructive power one could inflict was higher with a spell. Of course, these weren't the only reasons why Mana manipulation wasn't used by others. If Artpe didn't have his Innate Ability, Read All Creation, he wouldn't be able to figure out his opponent's tendencies ahead of time. He wouldn't be able to properly respond with his Mana.

Artpe hadn't really given a detailed explanation about his Innate Ability to Maetel. Despite that fact, she passively accepted everything he said by saying, 'Artpe is amazing!' This was why there was no need to give a more thorough explanation. If he said it, she believed it!

“It is scary, but I'll do my best, Artpe!”

“Before we do anything...”

“Huh?”

While Maetel was tilting her head in confusion, Artpe unhesitatingly strode towards the bottom step of the stairway connected to the entrance to the Dungeon. He gathered Mana into his hand.

“Is there a monster there, Artpe!?”

“No.”

Artpe’s hand knocked on the riser of the bottom step. The stair reacted to the Mana, and it opened up like a drawer. A large wooden box appeared. Maetel’s eyes turned round. Artpe had a delighted expression on his face. He laughed as he turned to look at Maetel.

“However, there is a treasure box here.”

“Artpe is really amazing!”

“Yes, I’m amazing.”

As always, Artpe didn’t stop Maetel from giving him praise.

In the past, this single ability allowed him to rise to the seat of the Four Heavenly Kings! Artpe was feeling good, so he decided to be a little bit more kind in his explanation.

“Most Dungeons have something called a Starter Set. These are for the fugitives, who were chased into the Dungeons, without knowing anything about the Dungeons. However, these people are being chased. They don’t have the luxury to search for secret locations.”

“Still, if they are lucky, they might be able to find it. So who made these preparations? I’m sure it was a kind person, who doesn’t want unsuspecting people to die within the Dungeons.”

“Kind person?”

Artpe grinned. The hero’s way of thinking was still too soft. She was soft like a warm pudding that was freshly made!

“The beginner’s equipment isn’t called beginner’s equipment for nothing. It’ll break after couple swings. There is nothing here that can be used for the duration of couple days. On top of that, it is very difficult to acquire additional equipments in the Dungeon unless one is experienced in traversing such Dungeons. Usually, the people, who were lucky enough to find the beginner’s equipment, are more likely to enter the Dungeon in high spirits. It gives them a false sense of confidence. This is the reason why most of them die.”

“D... does that apply to us!”

“It doesn’t, because we are heroes.”

“I see!”

Artpe gave another explanation, and Maetel once again accepted that explanation.

This is why it is easy to have a dummy by one’s side!

“First, let’s equip you with all of this. This rusted steel sword will break after swing it exactly 186 times. Ah, that number decreases by half if you imbue it with mana, hit a monster with a level difference of five or hit a monster’s bone. You have to be careful. Moreover, this leather armor is useless if you take a hit from a monster with a level difference of 3. Otherwise, it can survive 20 cuts from the monsters before it becomes useless.”

“All right. I’ll be careful.!”

Artpe had given a pretty detailed instruction, yet she readily nodded her head. Of course, there was no way she was able to remember all the details. However, she simplified it in her head as ‘I have to avoid being hit, and I have to kill them with the least number of swings as possible!’

“Huh? Aren’t there any weapons here that Artpe can use?”

“There is no god in this world that would think a magician would come into a beginner's Dungeon like this one.”

Artpe used Mana so naturally that it was easy to forget that there were very few number of magicians in the human world. First, one had to be born with the constitution for magic. Secondly, one had to be smart. Thirdly, one needed an

environment where there's a specialized school, who helped a young magician in dealing with Mana. A very small number of people possessed all three requirements.

"Artpe is really really amazing....."

"I know. I know."

In the box, there were two daggers, three emergency potions and a little bit of ration. Artpe put the potions and ration into a bag. Then he equipped the daggers on his waist.

"Artpe knows how to use daggers?"

"I know how to throw them."

Artpe had an exceptional talent of being able to find hidden stuff. He was also very talented at hitting targets with whatever he threw. In the past, he had grown up in the Demon world with nothing to his name. He didn't have the money to buy proper weapons or magic scrolls.

Before he caught the eyes of the Demon King, he had to manipulate Mana directly or he had to infuse Mana into objects to fight. He had used these tactics to defeat threats to himself.

He had already mentioned this before, but his tactics didn't work well against monsters in the Demon world. This was why Artpe's childhood had been very difficult. Even now his eyes teared up just from thinking about that period in his life.

"The only thing left now... All weapons differ in weight and balance. If you swing the sword thinking it is the same as the wooden branch you swung yesterday, you might be killed before you can say 'ah'. You should swing it about couple times to get a feel for it..."

Artpe was going through his 'Fifty reasons why beginner adventurers die' speech. He talked about information that was so obvious that people overlooked it. At that moment, Maetel swung the sword through the air, and she let out a bright smile as she let out a shout.

"Mmm, mmm. This will do! Weapons with edges are very scary!"

[Maetel]

[Level : 2]

[Swordsmanship Lv3]

“Ah, yes.”

He had been trying to give advice to a hero. It was basically akin to a little kid trying to lecture a court magician after reading a single tome of magic. After Artpe had this epiphany, he stepped forward. The hero grabbed him in surprise.

“You said there are monsters here!?”

“There should be none in front of us. I’ll be able to perceive everything.”

Normal monsters appeared in the beginner’s Dungeon, and the monsters couldn’t avoid his detection when he used the Mana threads. He was about to take another step with a leisurely smile on his face. However, he took a step backwards as his expression stiffened.

“.....I guess not.”

In the first room of the Dungeon, an Elite Monster was waiting near the exit. The Elite Monster was positioned perfectly. It was poised to take off the head of the adventurer trying to exit the first room. If Artpe didn’t have his Read All Creation ability, he would have suffered the same fate as a regular adventurer!

“Why’s there a monster of that caliber inside the 1st room on the 1st floor of a beginner’s Dungeon!”

“There are strong monsters in there?”

“There's a level 10 Elite Zombie inside. It possesses a Stealth ability, and the Critical Hit Skill. It is the ideal monster to kill low level adventurers.”

“Level 10?”

It was seven levels higher than the goblins they faced yesterday. However, the concept of levels was foreign to Maetel. She didn’t have a point of reference for levels, so she

had no idea how much stronger the monster was than her. She tilted her head in puzzlement.

“It is hard to feel the difference at the low levels, but the difference in levels represents the absolute power gap. Normally, one shouldn’t attack an opponent if there is a level gap of 5 levels.”

“Then we should run away immediately!”

“There was a king, who thought similarly. That bastard waged a war, but he failed spectacularly.”

“Who is it?”

“The Demon world’s greatest chef.”

Heroes always developed, while ignoring the level gap. This would be true this time around. Still, the Elite monster be too hard for a level 2. The hill was too steep, so Artpe formulated a plan to decrease the gradient.

“First, we have to kill all the monsters inside the room to increase our level. If we consider your Stats, even a single level increase will allow you to pierce through the Elite Monster’s defense.”

“What do I do after that?”

“If you walk forward as if nothing is wrong, the Elite Zombie will try to attack you. At that moment, I’ll attack to create an opportunity for you. You’ll attack afterwards for good measure, and you’ll retreat. Your attack won’t be too effective, but I’ll follow it up with an additional attack. Don’t worry too much about it.”

“All right! What do I do afterwards?”

“Afterwards, you retreat and return to this entrance.”

“.....huh?”

“Just be familiar with the plan I explained right now. All right?”

“Yes!..... Yes?”

Maetel didn't see the need to retreat mid fight, so she still had questions about the plan. However, Artpe didn't give any further explanations. Maetel tilted her head in puzzlement as she entered the Dungeon's first room with Artpe.

"I... Wa... Wa....."

"Humans... Killed me..."

"Daughter's face..... Want to see....."

It was a pretty large room and there were a total of six zombies there! Unlike the Elite Zombie, these zombies were around level 5. When they entered the room, the zombies became aware of them. They slowly got up.

The zombies were letting out a rotting stench, and their nails were poisonous. They were a very annoying opponent to face, but they were easy to kill. The zombies were slow. It was the ideal candidate for a beginner hero to face.

"What shall we do, Artpe? He wants to see his daughter's face..."

Their enemies were getting up slowly, and this was the ideal time to attack them. However, Maetel wasn't moving at all! Tears gathered in her eyes when she heard their words.

He had expected her to snap under the pressure. He had expected her to get angry.

Artpe nodded his head as if he understood her feelings. He spoke to her.

"Occasionally, there are some adventurers, who hesitate from attacking, when they hear the words spoken by the zombies."

"That's right! How can we attack such pitiful people! We can't kill them twice!"

"However, there's something unusual here to be discovered."

Artpe turned to look at Maetel with sharp eyes.

"If we wait a little bit longer, all the zombies will speak in a uniform pattern. This fact can be observed."

“My daughter's... · I want to see…….”

“Yes, just like that.”

“Wow. I think that zombie also has a daughter.”

“There is more to it than that.”

Maetel and Artpe had responded to their words, and the zombies felt their advance slow. Several zombie hesitated before they started talking about the same subject!

“Daughter... My daughter…….”

“My daughter’s face…… See…….”

“Its seems they were all blessed with daughters!”

“If we gathered 100 zombies here, they would all have said the same thing. They don’t have daughters. They are just trying to make you hesitate.”

“Mmm...?”

This was when Maetel’s reaction changed.

“Are they... Are they perhaps lying?”

“Isn’t it shocking? However, all monsters lie in order to kill humans. The brains of these zombies are all rotted away. Monsters lie on instinct.”

“…….”

Maetel didn’t respond to Artpe’s words. The hero just bit her lips. Then she lashed out towards the nearest zombie. She severed its legs.

The strike was so strong and sharp that Artpe wanted to question if she really was a level 2! It was as if the thread holding up the zombie had been severed. It fell to the floor as it writhed.

[Maetel]

[Level : 2]

[Critical Hit Lv1]

“Lying is bad.....”

Matel raised her gaze.

Artpe let out a gasp as he took a step backwards.

There was a towering rage within Maetel’s eyes!

“Lying is bad!”

“Daughter.....”

“Stop lying!”

“Daughhhhhhhter!”

The hero’s fight was incredible. No one had taught her this tactic, yet she severed the legs of zombies slowly coming towards her. The zombies were all writhing on the ground!

The hero yelled with fire raging in her eyes.

“I’ll never believe a monster’s words from now on!”

“Yes, that’s the stance to take!”

An ex-Four Heavenly King had succeeded in making the hero abandon her good character!

“Goo-wuhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Of course, the zombies had fallen to the floor, but they continued moving by dragging their bodies forward. Their speed of advance was incredibly slow. Maetel approached the closest zombie, and she cut off the head of the zombie. She went down the line.

After she cut three heads, she turned around to look at Artpe as if she had just remembered something she had forgotten.

“If I kill them all, I’m the only one that’ll grow. Artpe has to increase his level!”

“No, you can kill the rest. You are the one fighting from the front. You are more important than me right now.”

“All right!”

When Artpe said his words, Maetel unhesitatingly finished off the zombies. It seemed she was still enraged by the fact that the zombies had lied to her. Of course, even in her angered state, she was careful in preserving the sword’s durability. Her actions were praiseworthy.

When she killed the six zombies, Artpe stepped forward to tap on the zombies.

“Let’s loot first...”

“No matter how many times I see it, it is fascinating.”

Of course, the loot that came out from the lousy zombies weren’t much better than what the goblins had dropped. The only thing that dropped with greater probability was their long nails, which was seeped with poison. It was a very good weapon for the current Artpe.

“There are three poisoned nails and five copper coins. That should be it. Now you should walk...”

Artpe was instructing Maetel on what to do next, but he shut his mouth. He had naturally activated his Read All Creation, and he had shut his mouth when he saw the information in front of him.

[Maetel]

[Level - 4]

“What?”

Maetel tilted her head in puzzlement. However, Artpe let out a bitter laugh as he shook

his head from side to side.

“It’s nothing.”

The six zombies were level 5 monsters, but this didn’t mean her level should have grown from level 2 to 4 in one sitting. However, this was normal for her.

‘Heroes are an abnormality. This was especially true for this one in particular if her Innate ability was taken into account... I’m pretty sure that this iteration of the hero will awaken to the same ability.’

A spike of jealousy towards the hero was felt by him, but it disappeared quickly. This hero was on his side now. He spoke once again to the pure and simple girl, who was looking at him with worried eyes.

“Just walk forward.”

“Yes.”

Maetel didn’t hesitate. She walked forward. When she reached the exit, the hidden Elite Zombie appeared, and it tried to bite her neck. Artpe threw a Mana-infused dagger. The Elite Zombie stiffened!

“Goo-wuhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

“Eh-eet!”

Its Stealth ability was down, so Maetel was able to see the bastard. She unhesitatingly swung her sword towards its leg! Of course, this zombie wasn’t called Elite for nothing. There was no way its leg would be cut off with a single blow like the other zombies.....

“Goo-wuhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

“It fell off!?”

“I’m really angry right now!”

“Kee-ahhhhhh!”

The next attack severed both legs, and the Elite Zombie fell to the floor!

A level 10 Elite monster usually needed a 3 member party of similar level to take it down. Maetel had been able to neutralize it with just three hits.

“So we have to return to the entrance now, Artpe?”

Maetel took two steps away from the Elite Zombie. She gallantly yelled towards Artpe. Artpe looked at the fierce girl. He scratched his head as he gave a reply.

“No, you can just kill it.”

“Huh?”

“I said you can just kill it.”

“Huh...?”

The hero was much stronger than he had estimated, so his plan had went up in smoke. Artpe tilted his head, and he watched the girl’s sword find the Elite Zombie’s weak spot in an instant. As he watched her repeatedly bring down the sword...

He just decided to laugh it off.

Chapter 6

Dungeon with Death (2)

Many adventures entered the dungeons with dreams of becoming rich overnight. However, most of them were wiped out before they were able to get past the 1st floor. The reasons varied. They might be lacking in combat capability, or they might not have caught sight of a trap. They might have mismanaged their equipments or they might have ran out of food.

“Wow, Look! Look at this stairway! Does this stairway perhaps lead to the second floor?”

“Yes, that’s right...”

Of course, their team’s battle capability was taken care of by the human hero Maetel. Everything else was taken care of by the ex-Four Heavenly King Artpe. There was no way this two man team would face any difficulties here. After defeating the Elite Zombie, Maetel had advanced into being a level 6. The momentum created by Maetel allowed them to clear the 1st floor in just 6 hours. They had cleared it at superspeed. At the end of the 1st floor, Maetel was level 8, and Artpe somehow managed to advance into being level 5.

“Mmmmmmm. Why am I progressing so fast? Artpe is more amazing than me.”

“It is usually like that. Each person has a different area of expertise.”

Maetel’s growth speed was much faster than his. He should be upset at this reality, but Artpe already knew about the growth speed displayed by the hero in his previous life. In Artpe’s eyes, the current Maetel was progressing very slowly. She’ll probably level up much faster when she awakens to her Innate ability.

“This won’t do.”

“What?”

Unlike Artpe, who had just accepted this fact, Maetel thought long and hard in front of the stairway Afterwards, she resolutely nodded her head as she turned to look at

Artpe.

“We have to match our levels.”

“No, we really don't need to do that. As I said before, it'll be safer for us if you leveled up, since you are in the front...”

“We have to match our levels.”

The light in Maetel's eyes was very serious. Artpe couldn't help but ask the question.

“What's the reason behind this?”

“If our level difference is too high, I'm afraid we will grow apart.”

“You are using some pretty poetic figure of speech.....?”

However, the point brought up by Maetel unexpectedly touched on the core of a problem faced by all parties. This was one of the main reasons why most parties broke up over time. If one member of the party increased his level too quickly, it meant the other party member would fall behind. As the difference in level becomes more severe, the difference in ability also widened. At that point, it was mutually harmful for that party to remain together. It was to be expected, since a monster's level wasn't fluid. It didn't adjusted to the level of its opponent.

‘I'm pretty sure this dummy didn't think that far ahead... She simply doesn't want a gap to form between the two of us.’

Artpe let out a bitter laugh. He had wanted to overwhelmingly develop Maetel's ability. This would allow him simply stand in the back. He had planned on eating the crumbs off her table. However, he had no choice now, since the hero wouldn't let go of this issue. He had to keep step with her to a certain extent.

“All right. We'll do that, but my growth rate is much slower than yours. It'll be impossible to match our levels. How about we split the monsters evenly?”

“I really would like it to be the same...”

Maetel grumbled as if she didn't like the idea, but in the end, she accepted it.

“Well, let’s head up then.”

“Why are you going up? You should stand still.”

After Artpe browbeat Maetel, he extended his Mana infused hand. He grabbed and pulled at something in the empty air. Suddenly, the stairway in front of them collapsed as a fairly large wooden chest rose up. Maetel shouted in joy. Artpe winked at her as he gave her an explanation.

“This is a trap. If you went up without discovering this box, poisoned needles would have shot out from the floor to kill you.”

“Heeeeek!”

“Of course, even if someone was lucky enough to find this box, they wouldn’t have known that this is a monster called Mimic. It is pretending to be a treasure chest, and most adventurers usually die from its attack.”

“Ooooooh.”

“The worst part happens when one identifies and kills the Mimic. It shoots out poisoned needles when it is killed.”

“I don’t like this anymore!”

In truth, the level 5 zombies were to be expected inside a Dungeon near a beginner’s town. However, they had encountered a pretty elaborate trap within the Dungeon, and that fact did surprise him. He was also surprised at finding an Elite monster within the first room of the Dungeon!

“The past hero didn’t explore this Dungeon. There were only shitty zombies out at the entrance, so she hadn’t even bothered to come into this Dungeon. Since this is supposed to be a beginner’s Dungeon, I might have underestimated it... Maybe this Dungeon is... ’

This might be a hidden treasure trove. Artpe swallowed back the words he had almost blurted out. A beautiful flower had its thorns. Currently, they needed an opportunity to safely level up. They shouldn’t be putting their life on the line to earn treasures. This couldn’t be seen as being all good news.

“What should I do, Artpe?”

“Get back.”

“Yes!”

Artpe was holding four long nails between his fingers. Of course, these were the nails gathered by diligently killing the zombies. As expected, it was a lousy weapon. It could inflict a very weak poison effect when thrown towards an opponent.

On the other hand, it was an entirely different story if it was used by someone, who could infuse his Mana. He could strengthen the items. Its toxicity and sharpness was strengthened, but the nails would cease to exist once the Mana was exhausted. It was a single use weapon, but it would be able to cause significant amount of damage!

Of course, if one was skilled enough to infuse and strengthen an item, one wouldn't usually use it on nails acquired from zombies. It would be much better to use it on throwing weapons. Still, this method of Mana infusion was only known to those, who suffered from cold and hunger, like Artpe in the past. It was a very sad actuality.

“Eh-eet.”

When Artpe confirmed that Maetel had retreated behind his back, he quickly and accurately threw four nails towards the box. The Mimic had passively stood still like a wooden box, but when the nails were about to hit, it let out a weird sound. Then it jumped to avoid the nails...

“It's a fake, you retard!”

[Geeeeeeeeeeee!]

In a flash, the nails changed direction to pierce the wooden box. The Mimic hung in the air, and the trap located below its original position activated. Several dozen poison needles shot out of the ground to riddle the Mimic's body with holes!

[Gee-geek!]

It let a short cry before it became silent. It had bitten its tongue in its death.

Maetel, who had stayed silent, carefully asked Artpe a question.

“Is it over...?”

“Yes, it is over...”

The Mimic was one of the rare and special monsters. Therefore, the ‘reward’ it dropped was overwhelmingly better when compared to its difficulty. As proof, Artpe’s EXP exploded upwards after defeating it. He had leveled up twice, and he felt the energy within his body surge forward. Even if he hadn’t checked it with his Read All Creation ability, the Mimic was most definitely dead.

“Artpe is really amazing... I never expected you to kill it in such a way!”

“I’m going to get sick of hearing that soon.”

Artpe replied flatly, and he moved towards the dead Mimic. The dead Mimic, which had its tongue out, was flipped over by Artpe. When he shook it, coins and small daggers fell onto the floor. When she saw this, Maetel yelled out in surprise.

“I thought this monster wasn't a treasure box. What’s going on?”

“It swallowed humans, who mistook it for a treasure chest. It digested everything it could, and the rest are leftovers kept inside its body. This is also another reason why it is easy to confuse a Mimic with a treasure chest.”

“Monsters are really bad...!”

“I wouldn’t really say they are bad...”

The monsters were born this way. Humans slaughtered and ate innocent pigs and cows. It was the same with monsters. They ate humans. This couldn’t be simply be explained by the concept of good and evil. Everyone was just struggling to live.

“However, for us to live, he have to kill all of them.”

“I’m not sure what you are trying to say, but I’ll defeat anything that torments Artpe!”

When she killed the goblins for the first time, she had trembled like a leaf from the shock. This happened only yesterday, yet she was quick to act heroic in front of him now.

For a moment, the image of the hero from the past superimposed on the current hero, and it gave him the goosebumps. Now that he thought about it, the past hero hadn't shown any signs of hostility towards him. Instead, she had felt sorry and worry for him. This truth came to him a bit late. He kept a loose smile on his face as he collected the loot from the Mimic.

They had earned only 26 bronze coins from killing all the zombies on the first floor. The Mimic had barfed out 138 bronze coins. Moreover, there were a whopping three silver coins within the loot. Each silver coin was worth a 100 times more than a bronze coin.

If one possessed 2 silver coins, one could feed a family of four for a month. Maetel had lived her entire life in the back-country, so of course, the amount made her eyes turn round.

"Amazing!"

"This is nothing compared to what you'll experience and earn from now on."

"Don't say 'you', say 'us'!"

"Yes, yes..."

After he roughly ruffled Maetel's head, he threw the empty husk of the Mimic to the floor. The dead corpse cleanly vaporized into the air, and in its place, a book was left behind. It was as absurd a scene as the goblins spitting out the bronze coins.

"It is a book...?"

"The Mimic is a rare monster that is very hard to encounter. Moreover, it is very troublesome to kill. This is why the 'reward' is overwhelmingly generous. It is generous in terms of EXP and..."

It didn't matter if the content of the book was lousy. A magic book was guaranteed to be worth 30 silver coins no matter what. He grinned as he picked up the 'Skill Book'.

"...items. If one is able to safely kill the Mimic, it is the same as finding a treasure box."

"Amazing!"

Maetel couldn't write, but she could read a little bit. She clapped her hands as she looked over the book.

"Amazing. It says Hyper Loving! Love means deep affections. Didn't Artpe teach me that before? This means this magic is related to love!"

"Uh... Mmm. Nope."

Artpe hadn't read the name of the skill... no, he hadn't read the name of the Spell Book yet. When he heard Maetel's words, his face crumpled in distress. Why did such an item have to come out! On the other hand, Maetel wasn't even aware of what Artpe was thinking inside. Her cheeks were bright red as she fidgeted in place.

"With this magic, Artpe and I... Our l... love will..."

"It isn't love. It is rub."

"What does rub mean?"

"Rubbing means friction."

".....huh?"

Maetel tilted her head. However, Artpe's expression was still crumpled in a harsh manner.

It was a useless spell for him!

The Rubbing type spells were divided into Soft Rubbing, Rubbing, Hard Rubbing and Hyper Rubbing. It looked mysterious, because it was subdivided into 4 types. However, its special effect was very simple.

It basically allowed one to rub Mana against one's enemies!

In the off chance that there was some secret meaning hidden behind the spell, Magicians had conducted research on this spell. However, nothing much was gained from the studies. This didn't mean the research had been completely fruitless. Some high ranking aristocrats, who possessed enough wealth to hire mages, found that the Rubbing magic allowed them to feel some peculiar sensations. It opened the door to some awkward possibilities. It was best to omit such details.

“Basically, Hyper Rubbing is the same as rubbing very hard.”

“Mmm. Ooooooh-mmmmm.....?”

If there was one advantage to this spell, the Rubbing Skill didn't have any level restrictions. Artpe would have no trouble learning it right now.

At this point, Maetel had another question.

“So why do you have to learn such a useless magic?”

“All Skill Books and Spell Books allows one to expand one's limits, It grows one's abilities. This effect occurs just from learning it. This is why all Skill Books and Magic Books are expensive despite its content.”

This was one of the biggest reasons why the hero class was considered to be a cheat. The hero could learn all Skills and Spells. If there was a supply of Skill Books, the hero could basically learn all of them using just the base ability!

“Ah. Of course, Skills or Magic can fail if you don't completely understand what you learned. This is why it isn't such an overwhelming advantage to learn these Books. The technical term for this is called Failure effects. You should remember that term.”

“Failure effects... I memorized it!”

Of course, this term was unrelated to Artpe. He had the Read All Creation. He was able to understand all phenomena! Artpe immediately learned the Hyper Rubbing, and the purity of his magical energy increased. It bolstered his body. He felt the overwhelming magical energy fill him, and he let out a deep sigh.

“Hoo-oooooh.”

Even if Rubbing was a useless magic, Hyper Rubbing was the best tier amongst the Rubbing magic. Of course, the level of magical knowledge within was high (the result was lousy), and the amount of Mana reacting to the activation of the magic was also enormous (the result was lousy). Still, Artpe had gained almost 20 magical energy just from learning the spell. The effect was amazing!

“Maybe, this might be better than learning a mediocre spell like the Fire Needle. The Mana I can throw around will be stronger than most fireballs.”

“As expected, Artpe is amazing!”

“I knew you were going to say that. Let’s go.”

They had gathered everything that needed to be gathered. If one looked only at the results, one could see that they were growing at ridiculous rate. He couldn’t shake the feeling that this didn’t feel right to him. Still, Artpe had no choice, but to move forward.

Maetel reaffirmed the fact that Artpe was amazing. She was filled with pride for him, and she followed behind him like a puppy.

The party of heroes safely entered the second floor. Then they cleared the third floor and the fourth floor. They were moving so fast through the Dungeon that they were bringing in more supply than they were using. They were able to gather weapons and food. The most important resource was water, but they were able to solve the problem of acquiring water in the middle of the second floor. They had found a spring.

After the Elite Zombie, no Elite monsters had appeared. The monsters didn’t stand a chance against Artpe’s poison nails and Maetel’s sword. The Dungeon exploration was very easy.

This was how the two heroes reached the 6th floor of the Dungeon.

“What the hell! How long is this Dungeon!”

“Dungeons are really fun! Let’s keep going forward!”

“Hey! There’s a trap over there! Stop!”

At this point, Maetel was level 29, and Artpe had reached level 24.

Chapter 7

Dungeon with Death (3)

As they explored the 6th floor of the Dungeon, Artpe was gradually feeling an odd sensation. No matter how he thought about it this Dungeon was too long.

“What kind of Dungeon is this?”

“Aren’t all Dungeons like this?”

“Most Dungeons are 3 floors long. This is abnormal.”

Normally, if one looked at the Dungeon entrance, one could generally assess the difficulty of a Dungeon. If a level 5 monster appeared on the first floor, the boss’ level was usually level 10 in the beginner’s Dungeon.

If there was an extra floor, the boss’ level would be around 15. If the Dungeon was longer than expected, it would usually end on the third floor. The boss’ level would be around level 20. Even if the beginner adventurers were able to break through the Dungeon easily, they would all be killed in the end.

But this place...

[Humans... I will kill everyone, who dares to intrude.]

“Hoo-ahhhhhhhhp!”

A level 33 Skeleton was quickly charging towards them. Its eyes were emitting a blue light. Maetel unhesitatingly charged forward to meet the Skeleton. She dodged the Bone Sword way too easily, and she swung a Bone Club acquired from a Skeleton Warrior. It ruthlessly crushed the Skeleton’s skull.

From the rear, two Skeleton Archers had been trying to let loose Bone Arrows. Artpe had already taken care of them by throwing Mana infused Bone Daggers towards them. The battle within the 3rd room of the 6th floor ended without any complications.

“We are already on the 6th floor, yet there are no signs of this Dungeon ending!”

“I won again! Hoo-hee-hee.”

As Maetel kept winning, she realized that there was pleasure in triumph. Artpe was sure she hadn't acted this way in the past, so he wondered what had happened to ruin the trajectory of her growth. Was Artpe really the one to cause this change? In his past life, if the Demon King had seceded his seat to Artpe, he wondered if he would have been able to bring about a victory for the Demon world against the human world. This was how great his brainwashing was!

“Why is Artpe so good at throwing weapons?”

“You were able to freely control and wield a blunt weapon when you picked it up. My skills aren't as great as yours.”

[Maetel]

[Level : 29]

[Blunt Weapon Lv4]

Artpe snorted at Maetel's words as he looted the fallen Skeletons. Maetel was now used to the concept of looting, so she helped Artpe. A silver coin had dropped from one of the monsters. It felt as if it was eons ago(it had been around 4 days) when they had been surprised by the appearance of silver coins. Now the two of them picked it up without being surprised by its presence.

“It feels almost magical when my level increases. I know I am the same person, yet I am well aware that that I can do much more now! Something I would consider to be miraculous in the past is now part of my daily life. Things that I considered to be impossible are within my reach. This really is quite enjoyable.”

“Normally, that sensation can be barely achieved only after undergoing countless tribulation. Please keep that in mind.”

Of course, Artpe was going through the same process as her, but Artpe had experienced reaching level 350 in his past life. He was able to keep everything in perspective.

Maetel's talent wasn't simply better than others, because she had superior strength and status. It had to do with her constitution and level. Moreover, she possessed an instinct that allowed her to adapt in battle situations. She had the potential to bring out the best result from within herself.

"Currently, we are on par with most mercenaries. I'm talking about career mercenaries, who've been to war."

"What are you saying, Artpe? We are just 12 years old!"

When he heard those words, Artpe sharply glared at her as he spoke to Maetel.

"You should never judge the strength of others based on their appearance or age. This is the first rule of survival."

"Y... yes..."

"Moreover, I don't want you to blame our weakness on our age. Our enemies won't go easy on us, because we are young."

"Yes, all right... Artpe is too cool."

"You always come to a weird conclusion."

Artpe finished his looting. He checked his equipment, ration and water by habit as he extended his Mana Threads. For the past couple days, he had learned to handle Mana inside a human boy's body. His use of Mana had come a very long way compared to the first time he manifested his Mana. He hadn't confirmed this yet, but if he checked in own information, his Mana Control skill should have developed nicely.

"Mmmmm?"

Something was caught on his Mana Thread. He had been thinking everything was going too smoothly after they had encountered the Elite monster on the 1st floor. It was still a long ways off, but at the end of the 6th floor, Artpe could feel the presence of a monster superior to any monster they had faced up to this point. It was a Skeleton, but it was holding a bastard sword that was most definitely not made out of bones...

[Koo-ohhhhhhhhhhhhh!]

His Mana Thread was severed.

“Crazy!”

The monster possessed self-awareness, and it could handle Mana!? After Artpe assessed the situation, he once again sent several dozen threads into his surrounding. At the same time, he grabbed Maetel’s hand.

“Run! Right now!”

“No matter who the enemy is, we should try fighting it first.....”

“This is completely different from the Elite Zombie we met earlier! Run!”

“All right!”

The two started running in a hurry. They had doubled back, but a Skeleton was approaching them at overwhelming speed. Each room of the Dungeon was separated by a steel door, and the Skeleton was simply busting through them as it gathered the other monsters under its command. It was the worst type of Elite monster!

“Do you think I’ll go down... so easily!”

His Mana Threads had been severed, but he had sent out his Mana Threads once again. This move wasn’t a waste of Mana. Artpe had used the power of his Read All Creation ability, and he used it to activate all the traps with his Mana Threads. The traps got in the way of the Skeletons.

[Goo-wuhhhhhhhh!]

The Skeletons were being destroyed at various locations. Even the Elite Skeleton leading the horde was being damaged. Still, the Elite Skeleton hadn’t slowed down much. Instead, it started using the corpses of dead Skeletons to shield itself from the traps.

“Tsk.....!”

This Dungeon had been annoying in the fact that it had more traps than monsters. However, none of the traps would be able to cause critical damage to the Elite Skeleton. Artpe mainly focused on killing the Skeletons trailing behind the Elite Skeleton with

the traps. Artpe and Maetel kept retreating.

“Where are we running to, Artpe?!?”

“We are going to the Dungeon entrance.”

“The Dungeon entrance? Wait a moment... The Dungeon entrance on the first floor!?”

Maetel asked as if she wished this wasn't the case, but Artpe nodded with a stiff expression on his face.

“If we don't get there in time, we are dead.”

“We can't win against it?”

“It is impossible to win against it through a frontal assault.”

Even if Maetel was an extraordinary genius, she was a hero, who had reached level 29 in less than a week. There was no way she would be able to win against it. Of course, she would lose, since the Elite Skeleton was level 60. The important fact was that it had already crossed the level 50 threshold.

“In exchange for being able to learn all Skills, we will continue to be heroes until we defeat the Demon King. Aside from the Demon race, all the other races gain a high rank Class when they reach certain levels. It allows one to become more powerful and more specialized. The first time one could earn this high rank Class is at level...”

It was at level 50. Monsters were no exception. There was a stark difference between monsters that had or hadn't crossed the level 50 threshold. It wasn't an exaggeration to say a level 50 monster was 1.5 times stronger than a level 49 monster. The Elite Skeleton had already passed level 50. It had reached level 60!

“It is also equipped with a proper sword and a shield. This means it had gained a Warrior type high rank Class. It possesses the ability to command all the Undeads in this Dungeon. A monster of this caliber could easily dispose any of the normal low rank Dungeon bosses.”

The bastard was breaking through the Dungeon at an incredible speed. There weren't any traps left that Artpe could activate any more. He had been successful in destroying a good amount of normal Skeletons. Still, it would be hard for Artpe to do anything

against them anymore. The Elite Skeleton was gradually closing the distance. If things progressed in this fashion, they would have to fight it before they could climb to the 5th floor.....

“.....get on, Artpe.”

At that moment, Maetel spoke with a firm voice.

What did you she want him to do?

He let out a sound that expressed his confusion. However, Maetel didn't wait for him to give a concrete answer. She put him on her back!

“Heeng. I wanted this to be the other way around... Hmmph...”

“What the hell are you talk... Ooh-ahhhhhhhh!?”

[Maetel]

[Level : 29]

[Battle Dash Lv1]

Again!

She once again learned a Skill that transcended her level as if it was nothing... Moreover, it was an exclusive skill for the high rank Class! Artpe didn't have time to express his dismay. While she gave him a piggyback, Maetel started running through the hallways of the Dungeon at an incredibly fast speed!

“Hang on tight, Artpe!”

“Even if you hadn't said anything, I'm already doing that. Shit!”

Artpe was being carried on Maetel's back. It was unsightly, but he knew this was the most effective method. This was why he got comfortable in this position, and he stretched out a hand backwards. At that moment, they were climbing the stairs connecting the 6th and 5th floor. When they were about to reach the 5th floor, he grabbed Matel's shoulder. He stopped her.

“Wait a moment, Maetel.”

“What is it, Art... Kyahhhk!”

Even if it was pure Mana, one could physically manifest it if one brought out enough Mana. A thick Mana Iron Mace was formed in Artpe’s hand, and he brought it down against the stairway. The stairway let out a horrific sound as it crumbled!

“Artpe is amazing! It will no longer be able to follow us anymore!”

“No, it’ll probably destroy its Skeleton underlings to create a pile until it can reach this floor.”

“.....”

“Still, it’ll buy us some time, and at the same time, it’ll lessen the enemy’s numbers. Let’s hurry!”

They went from the 6th floor to the 5th, 5th to 4th, and 4th to the 3rd floor. It didn’t matter how fast they ran, and it didn’t matter how many stairways they had destroyed. The Skeleton Warrior kept increasing its speed. When they entered the 2nd floor, the Skeleton Warrior could be seen with the naked eye!

[Goo-wuhhhhhhhh!]

“You should try saying something else, you bone headed dummy!”

[I’ll kill humans!]

“It can say other lines!?”

On the second floor, there weren’t any decent traps that could be activated by Artpe. Artpe wondered if should attack the Elite Skeleton by throwing all of his throwing weapons. However, he determined it wasn’t the right moment to use his weapons. Instead, he activated the only magic he could cast.

“My will within me. I communicate with the world. Burst on the ground.”

[Goo-wuhhhhhhhh! Magic is useless.....]

“Hyper Rubbing!”

[Hmmm!?]

Even if he activated the Hyper Rubbing against his enemies, it would simply make their joints rub against each other. It was a useless attack. However, Artpe had not been aiming for the monsters. He was aiming for the hallway in front of them!

In a flash, the power of Mana started scrubbing hard against the hallway. The hallway shone from being polished. Maetel was impressed by this sight.

“Wow. Now that we have this magic, we don’t have to worry about cleaning!”

“You’ll never have to clean in your life.”

“Ah, no! We have to split the housework in a fair manner. I can’t make Artpe do all the hard work!”

The fact that she was able to spout such nonsense meant that Maetel’s condition was still ok! He was able to check the mental state of Maetel in an odd way. Afterwards, he checked on the monsters, who had been chasing them.

The very first monster he checked was the Elite Skeleton Warrior. It had been running in front of the mob. It knew that Artpe’s magic couldn’t directly damage its body, so it had unhesitatingly took a step forward. The Skeleton was like a dog on ice. It slid all over the place before it fell to the floor.!

[Kill humans, ahhhhhhhhhh!]

It had used a powerful Shouting skill, but it failed to damage the hero’s party. Instead, the normal Skeletons, who had been running behind the Elite Skeleton, started sliding on the floor towards the Elite Skeleton. The normal Skeletons delivered power body blows to the Elite Skeleton.

[Gwuhhhhhhhhh!]

[Gee-gee-gee-gee-gee-gee]

[My precious C3 cervical vertebrae.....!]

Artpe let out a shout of delight. While he was casting his magic, he hadn't been sure if his plan would work. Artpe had used the Hyper Rubbing spell on the earthen floor. The magic worked furiously as it made the ground slicker than an oiled steel plate. When the monsters stepped on the floor, the monsters had all fallen to the floor in order.

Artpe had used magical energy to influence the physical world. He had completely changed the terrain. Even if his enemy had the power to resist against the Mana, it couldn't avoid this debacle.

Artpe had learned this magic, because he couldn't throw it away. At this moment, the useless magic had allowed the two heroes to escape danger.

Chapter 8

Dungeon with Death (4)

The fact that the Skeletons were running at incredible speed meant that the effect of the collision was that much more powerful. The Skeletons impacted against each other as they became tangled. The ones that were impacted hard died. Artpe had come up with this idea in the spur of the moment, yet his plan had been incredibly effective!

“Of course, it is much more efficient in terms of Mana and time to use a magic spell that produces the same result.”

“Artpe is amazing.!”

“Yes, yes. I am amazing.”

The two of them had effectively blocked the rush attempt by the Skeletons, and they were able to arrive at the 1st floor. Of course, he had destroyed the stairway leading to the 1st floor in spectacular fashion. The regular Skeletons had to be made into stepping stones for the Skeleton Warrior to reach the 1st floor. In the end, only four Skeleton including the Elite Skeleton Warrior made it up to the 1st floor.

“The zombies aren’t back yet.”

“We killed them all. Other adventurers have to enter and die here for there to be new zombies.”

“I don’t want to know about such truths.....”

[Gwuhhhhhhhhhh!]

“Hey, hurry. Hurry.”

“Leave it to me!”

She carried a boy, who weighed more than her, through the Dungeon. She ran from the 6th floor to the 1st floor. It was as if his weight was negligible to her. Then there was

the boy, who kept impeding the progress of the monsters using his Mana Control and magic spells. If others saw this sight, they would have been in disbelief.

Even if their levels were high, their actual bodies, which used these abilities, were immature. Artpe spoke as if what they had done was nothing special, but he was looking at it through the standard of the Demon race, not humans!

“We are almost there. We are almost at the entrance!”

“Hurry up! They are just around the corner!”

[I’ll kill humans! I’ll kill humans!]

It seemed the Hyper Rubbing from before had caused a lot of damage. The Skeleton Warrior’s shield had a fairly large crack. He could see small thread-like fissures on its skull. If someone had told him the Skeleton Warrior had been in a battle before coming here, he would have believed it.

[Killllllllllllllllllllllllllllllll!]

However, it hadn’t been a true fight. It had been damaged this much by simply slipping and falling hard on the floor. This fact probably probably fueling its anger. There actually was a red energy blanketing its body. Artpe was sure it was a Buff type skill that allowed it to temporarily raise its abilities. It was triggered by its heightened emotional state. It was only an Undead, yet it had an Emotion type skill!

“Hurry!”

“Eeek. I’m falling behind. We aren’t going to make it... Artpe~”

“Tsk. It can’t be helped.”

He replied in a relaxed manner, but his Mana was close to being depleted. It would be impossible for him to once again make the entire length of the hallway slippery to stop the Skeletons. If so.....

“Eh-eet!”

“Kyahhhk!”

Artpe unfurled his hand as he manifested his magic. At that moment, Maetel slid down the hallway with Artpe on her back. To be precise, the path in front of them had turned smooth. It was as if the dirt hallway was pulling them forward!

Maetel realized Artpe was using his magic in front of them, so she was cautious as she tried her best not to fall over. Then she used the slick floor to propel herself forward. This girl's talent was really endless.

[Humaaaaaaaaaans!]

"We are going to die. We are going to d....."

"We've arrived!"

When he ran out of magic, the two of them were suddenly thrown forward towards the entrance of the Dungeon. Afterwards, the Skeleton Warrior's bastard sword passed through the location where Artpe's head used to be. Several strands of his hair was cut as it flew into the air.

[Koo-ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!]

"How dare you cut Artpe's hair! I won't forgive you!"

"Calm down!"

Maetel had taken out her club, and she was about to charge the Skeleton Warrior. Artpe desperately tried to hold her back. Afterwards, Maetel realized something weird had occurred.

"...what is it doing?"

"What does it look like it is doing?"

There was a boundary that separated the Dungeon's entrance from the 1st room. The Skeleton Warrior grinded its teeth as it swung its sword, but it stood beyond the boundary. Of course, the party had already entered into the Dungeon's entrance, so the bastard sword couldn't reach them.

"We are right in front of them, so why aren't they coming...?"

“The Dungeon’s monsters can’t come out to the Dungeon’s entrance.”

“Ah. I’m sure Artpe explained this to me before! So that is why they can’t come out even though they are right in front of us?”

“That’s right.”

The Skeleton underling had already fallen to the floor in exhaustion. Only the Skeleton Warrior kept swinging its sword as if it held lingering resentment towards them. Still, it looked less spirited compared to when it first showed up. It looked a bit lacking...

“So what is the reason behind it? I really don’t know, Artpe! How come? Huh?”

“Those are some very good questions.”

Artpe laughed in a kind manner as he answered her question. Of course, as he spoke, he was gathering Mana into his dagger to attack the silly Skeleton Warrior.

“I don’t know either!”

“Ah-ha. I see!”

This was why it was convenient to have a dummy next to you!

[Kill! Kill! Kill!]

“Yes. I want you to keep talking like that!”

Artpe replied in a friendly manner towards the Skeleton Warrior, whose words were filled with resentment and anger. He continued to gather his Mana. He had consumed an incredible amount of Mana, but he was recovering a fair amount by standing still.

This was something to be expected during his time as a Demon, but now he was a human child. This was atypical. He had the body of a human, yet his affinity with Mana was off the chart. Even if he used his Read All Creation ability, he couldn’t figure out why he was like this. He just decided to think of this as a boon.

[I’ll kill humans! Kill! I’ll kill... I give up.]

“Hey hey. Don’t give up now!”

The Skeleton Warrior had swung his bastard sword for a long time, but in the end, it came to a realization that it wouldn't be able to cross into the Dungeon's entrance. In front of this reality, it had been about to give up. This was when Artpe threw a Mana infused dagger toward it as he spoke words of encouragement.

Artpe was able to see the flight path of the dagger, since it was letting out a blue Mana that could only be seen by Artpe. The Mana flooded forward as the dagger embedded itself on top of the Skeleton Warrior's head. When the Skeleton Warrior had fallen from the Hyper Rubbing spell, the other Skeletons had crashed into it. It caused a thread-like fissure to form on its skull. The dagger had accurately burrowed into the fissure.

[Koo-ahhhhhhhhh! I'll kill you!]

"Yes! That's the right idea!"

"Artpe. You are so bad....."

The fire, which had been dimming, with the Skeleton Warrior started to burn white hot again. It had felt impotent before, but now it renewed its resolve. It diligently swung its sword. Artpe kept nodding his head as if to cheer on the Skeleton Warrior. He continued to recover his Mana. Maetel finally realized Artpe's tactic, so she asked with a dumbfounded look in her eyes.

"Artpe. I'm not talented at attacking from a distance. What should I do?"

"You can't do anything here. You should just eat the dry ration."

"Yes!"

Maetel busily ate the rations and water. As expected, she had consumed a lot of Stamina by running from the 6th floor to the 1st floor, while carrying Artpe. While she ate, he diligently gathered Mana, and he infused it into another dagger.

In the process of traversing the 6 floors, they had found articles left behind by the deceased adventurers, who had died over countless years. They had also found the treasure chests. This was why Artpe had an ample supply of throwing weapons. He didn't have to worry about running out of weapons.

[Human! Humaaaaaaaaaan! I give up!]

“No, you can do this!”

[I can't do this!]

“Don't believe yourself! I want you to believe in me, who believes in you!”

“.....”

The Skeleton Warrior kept swinging its sword, but it was mired in the feeling of hopelessness. Artpe had to keep attacking it. He had to keep it distracted. Maetel was watching a human and an Undead converse. She decided not to think too deeply about this. The important point right now was the fact that Artpe had brilliantly embedded four daggers into its body...

“All right. This is going smoothly.”

[Goo-ahhhhhhhh! I give up!]

“You suffered at the hands of children, who haven't even reached half your level. Are you really going to run away now?”

[Kooooooooooooooooo!]

If the Skeleton Warrior simply stayed here, Artpe would play around with it until it died. Unfortunately, the Skeleton Warrior's intelligence wasn't that high. Above all else, the Skeleton Warrior was in the grip of the Rage Buff.

The Buff was triggered by an emotion. The pros of a Buff skill was the fact that it didn't consume a lot of magical energy, yet it increased one's level significantly. If there was a downside, it was the fact that it was hard to break out of the emotion that had activated the Buff. This was why the Skeleton Warrior was unable to give up on the battle. It kept following the lead of Artpe for no particular reason than that.

“Take more of this! More! I'm sure you can do this longer, right?”

[Humannnnnnn! I'll kill you! I'll kill you!]

“Hmm. Its aggro is still fixed on us.....”

“Artpe?”

There were eight daggers stuck inside the body of the Skeleton Warrior. Artpe still had plenty of throwing weapons left, but he stopped throwing them.

“If we use this method to kill it, it’ll take us around four days.”

“Then are we going to give up? I think we can go out now! I’m not afraid of the soldiers or the goblins!”

After filling her stomach, she had recovered her energy. Maetel spoke in a valiant manner. In reality, it had only been a week, but their growth could almost be called an evolution. They could evade the soldiers, and it wouldn’t be too difficult to fight couple dozen of them and win! However, Artpe shook his head in a decisive manner.

“The probability of us running into an Elite monster is very low. Of course, this bastard is a strong and difficult opponent. However, when we kill it, the reward will be enormous. We can’t give up. This is too good of an opportunity to miss.”

In his previous life, Artpe would have snorted in disdain towards a reward given by a level 60 Elite monster. However, he was a level 24 beginner hero right now, and the only magic spell he knew was Hyper Rubbing. It was stupid to retreat when they had the chance to kill their enemy.

‘Moreover, this Dungeon itself keeps weighing on my mind...’

This place started with level 5 beginner monsters, yet a level 60 Elite monster had appeared on the 6th floor. This beginner’s Dungeon was hard to pin down. What was at the end of this Dungeon? What caused it to be so strange? These thoughts troubled him, so he couldn’t ignore it.

He possessed the Read All Creation ability, so Artpe had always known most of the answers before he could formulate a question. There was no end in sight to this Dungeon, and it interested him. Of course, he couldn’t deny the fact that there was danger here. However, if Artpe and Maetel were able to successfully conquer the Dungeon, they would gain a reward equal to the difficulty of the Dungeon. At the very least, it would be much better than being fattened up like pigs in the castle. It was better than rotting away there.

“So let’s just change our method.”

“Is it finally my time to step forward!?”

“No, you still can’t do anything against it. Just sit there and cheer for me.”

“Heeng.”“

In the end, Artpe’s thoughts led him towards an unexpected destination. It ended at his Hyper Rubbing magic. When he acquired it, he had thought it was a useless magic that could only cause friction. However, the magic had somehow saved them twice in their time of need. He had rubbed to cause changes to the terrain, and he rubbed to increase Maetel’s speed.

Unlike his initial assessment of this magic, this spell wasn’t simple. The most important aspect to pay attention to was the fact that it was able to cause a very large change to the environment compared to the amount of Mana being consumed.

“This is why... Maybe.....”

Artpe looked at the eight daggers embedded deeply into the Skeleton Warrior’s skull and other joints. When he checked the Mana within the daggers, his eyes shone.

He wondered if this this plan would really work. Still, they couldn’t keep playing games in front of the Dungeon’s entrance. He went about this with a devil-may-care attitude. He chanted his spell.

“My will shall manifest focused on the edge of the blade! Hyper Rubbing!”

Chapter 9

Growth of the Heroes (1)

[Magic can't hurt m..... Koohk!?!]

It suffered under his magic before, yet it was replying with the same idiotic answer! Of course, Artpe wouldn't directly apply his Magic on a Skeleton, who was twice his level!

The Magic appeared as if it had been pushed out from the confines of Artpe's body, and he focused on one of the daggers embedded in the Skeleton Warrior. He focused on the blade embedded within the elbow joint of the arm holding the shield. The Hyper Rubbing was focused on the blade, and it was causing enormous friction! Artpe worried the other blades would fall out from the vibration caused by the intense rubbing, so he had to concentrate his power.

[A mere trick was able to damage.....]

"I can't hear you. That trick broke your wide forehead. Why don't you speak a little bit louder!"

[Goo-ohhhhhhhhhh!]

The Skeleton Warrior reacted in a violent manner, and it started to move. Finally, Artpe got the reaction he wanted. The elbow joint had received an incredible amount of stimuli from the rubbing, and when the force of the violent movement was added to the mix, the bones started to let out an ominous sound.

A crunch was heard, and the arm was bent backwards in an odd angle!

[I'm a Skeleton! A mere broken bone won't..... Koohk!?!]

"You keep following the same pattern in becoming surprised. Aren't you tired of it?"

This was beyond the frictional force that arose from the dagger. The Skeleton Warrior used an enormous amount of power to move its arm. In the end, it exceeded the

threshold of abuse that could be taken by the joint. The joint was completely destroyed as the heavy shield and the arm holding it fell to the Dungeon's hallway!

[Koo-ahhhhhhhhh!]

"You are amazing, Artpe!"

"Give me more compliments!"

"Amazing! You are really incredible!"

He never suspected the Hyper Rubbing could be used to cause damage to a monster! The fact that it could cause incredible amount of friction was no joke. He had manifested the magic by using the weapon as a medium, and the Skeleton Warrior was unable to resist against the attacking using Mana Resistance. Artpe had been able to attack using friction!

He had learned Hyper Rubbing not too long ago, so he wasn't proficient at using the spell. This was why it took so long to achieve the desired effect. However, if he became adept at using this Magic later on, he would be able to achieve ludicrous results!

"Of course, I would achieve better results much faster if I learned other spells during that time!"

Artpe grumbled as he once again focused his Hyper Rubbing on a specific target. He got rid of the shield, so it was time to destroy the arm holding the sword! He was running a bit short on Mana, but if he was able to destroy both arms, he was confident they could win against it. Artpe didn't hold back as he used all his reserve power to command his magic.

[Goo-oooooooooh.....!]

As expected, the Skeleton Warrior realized what Artpe was trying to do, but it couldn't retreat. The rage that was blanketing its body refused to fade away. What should it do? What will allow it to kill the shitty little brat?

The Skeleton Warrior thought hard about its situation. After it agonized over its options, it came up with a single answer. It had watched the little brat do it over and over again. The Skeleton Warrior thought it could somewhat replicate what the brat did.

“Yes, you are doing well. You should move that arm more...”

[Die human!]

“Artpe!”

Artpe had been focused on using the Hyper Rubbing spell. The Skeleton Warrior put all its anger into its roar. At the same time, Maetel moved to knock Artpe out of the way.

“Gg-ooooooooohh.”

[Koo-ahhhhhhhh! Damn humans! Damn humaaaaaaans!]

Kwahng!

Accompanying the explosive sound, a large sword was embedded into the stairway of the Dungeon’s entrance. It was none other than the Skeleton Warrior’s bastard sword.

“Koo, ah.....”

“Maetel?”

Maetel let out a moan. The Skeleton Warrior had thrown the bastard sword with all its might. The sword had grazed her back. Her armor had been completely ripped into pieces, and to make matters worse, it left behind a wound on her back.

“Damn it, Maetel! Maetel!”

He never expected an enemy without the Throw skill to throw its bastard sword towards him! He had put his complete trust in his Read All Creation ability. His error in judgment had almost cost him his life.

He had shown a carelessness that was befitting his title as the weakest of the Four Heavenly Kings! If Maetel had been a bit late, Artpe would have lost his life.

“Let me see your wound. Hurry!”

“Ah. Oohk.....”

Artpe blamed his stupidity as he looked at Maetel's wound. A well-placed wound on the back could hamper one's movement. Fortunately, that wasn't the case. If she leveled up couple times alongside regular rest, her body would be back to a pristine state. It seemed Maetel was also aware of this fact, so her face wasn't clouded at all. She had a bright smile on her face.

"I'm alright, Artpe... I'm just glad Artpe isn't hurt."

"You idiot....."

When Artpe realized Maetel hadn't been hurt too badly, he truly felt relieved, and he also felt a weird feeling.

If she died, it would deal a very big blow to his dream of living a peaceful life. However, the feeling he had felt was caused by something else..... He must be mistaken. Artpe shook such dumb thoughts away as he raised his head.

He saw the Skeleton Warrior in front of him. It had gone berserk from the Rage type Buff. Its white bones had turned completely red.

The arm holding the shield was on the ground, and the other arm had also fallen off when it couldn't withstand the shock. The bastard raged as it threw its body forward, but there was an invisible wall blocking it. It blocked its forward progress no matter how it tried to charge forward.

[Gg-oooooooooh! Gg-oooooooooh!]

"Can you move, Maetel?"

"Yes....."

If Maetel wasn't injured, he would have finished off the Skeleton Warrior. However, the top priority right now was to level her up, so she could recover. Of course, Artpe had done most of the work, so not much EXP would go to Maetel. However, this EXP was from killing a very strong opponent. A smaller portion of the EXP would still be enough to level her up!

"Hoo-ooh, hoo-ooh..... All right. I'll do it."

Maetel was breathing roughly as she got up. She was about to pull out her rusted

sword, but her gaze headed backwards as she looked towards the bastard sword embedded in the stairway. She hesitated before she approached the bastard sword. She extracted it with both hands.

It was made out of heavy metal, and magical energy had been used to manufacture the sword. It was a very heavy sword. However, she swung it easily.

[Human.....]

“I’m sorry. I can’t beat you in a fair fight. However, I’m able to kill you now, so I will kill you.”

She had taken the enemy’s weapon, yet she had taken complete possession of the weapon from just swinging it once or twice. Maetel glared at the Skeleton Warrior as she spoke. It was almost as if she was chanting her words.

“I’ll win and kill anyone to protect Artpe. Because I’m...”

She pulled the hilt of the sword towards her chest. She kept a firm grip as she slightly bent her knees. She leaned her upper body forward.

The Skeleton Warrior raised its leg slightly to face her. Maetel used the burning pain from her back as the starting signal. She kicked off the ground.

“Because I’m! I’m the hero!”

[Koo-ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!]

As she let out a short shout, the sword split the air. Her sword struck at the exact spot where Artpe’s dagger was embedded in its skull. The sword cut through the skull, and she broke all its ribs.

If the Skeleton Warrior was in its normal state, it could have resisted against her attack. However, the strike was too much for the current Skeleton Warrior. After its body was broken by the sword, it twitched as if it wanted to fight back. However, the Skeleton Warrior came to a complete stop.

[Gooh, ah ah... Ah, ah. I... is... is that so?]

Surprisingly, the bisected Skeleton started to say something.

[The will within the unshakable blade has awoken me up from my haze.....]

“Mmm. What.....?”

[That’s right, young heroes. Those who run away and never come back are called cowards. However, the ones that come back to win in the end are heroes. You win by fair means or foul. You have carried on your conviction to protect. With my demise, I will open the entrance that will lead to the glory of the heroes.]

“What the hell is the Skeleton saying.....?”

Artpe was flustered as he asked the question, but the Skeleton Warrior no longer opened its mouth. The magical energy from its body drained out as it entered Artpe and Maetel. Their magical energy increased, and the EXP was distributed. The battle was over.

“Hey, wait a moment. If you have something to say to us then you should talk more..... Shit.”

Artpe urgently stood up, and he tried to look at the Skeleton Warrior with his Read All Creation ability. At that moment, its body eroded away. It left behind the cracked large steel shield, Red Bone gauntlet, and several bones that refused to erode away. These bones had too much Magical energy to immediately erode away.

However, the truly surprising event started afterwards. When the Skeleton Warrior was completely gone, the Dungeon started to shake in a fierce manner. After killing the Skeleton Warrior, Maetel had slowly relaxed, but now her eyes were round as she ran towards Artpe.

“Artpe. The Dungeon is.....!”

“Wait a moment. It isn’t collapsing. There are times when a Dungeon goes through a change when one fulfills a specific condition. So right now it...”

He would just be beating a dead horse by repeating the fact that the Dungeon was hiding something. Maybe, this Dungeon might be beyond Artpe’s expectation. Something enormous might lie inside the Dungeon.

If so, what should he do? Should they back out? Or should they move forward, while accepting the risk? If he hadn’t seen Maetel get injured, he wouldn’t have hesitated. He

would have advanced, but Artpe couldn't do that any more.

"Let's go, Artpe."

At that moment, Maetel realized he was hesitating, so she spoke to him.

"I want to become stronger. If there comes a time when we have to run away, we'll run away and win later. However, if possible, I want to win without running away."

"Maetel....."

"That is why I want to become stronger."

Was this really words spoken by a 12 year old girl? Artpe shut his mouth from amazement, but he firmed his resolve when he saw the the unshakable light within Maetel's eyes.

Currently, she wasn't repeating words she had heard from someone else. She wasn't just spouting words in a childish fit. Her experience within the Dungeon had been short, but a lot had happened during that time. It seemed she had found some purpose, and she wanted to put it into practice.

This was the change that Artpe had wanted to see within her.

".....yes, let's go. No matter what shows up, we'll defeat it. Let bring out everything we can gain from inside the Dungeon."

"Yes!"

The Read All Creation ability wasn't perfect, but it was a power that was closest to perfection. If he combined his ability with Maetel's almost cheat-like talent, they were a perfect pair. They had been perfect a moment ago, and they will be perfect in the future. There was no reason why they shouldn't go forward.

His confidence was baseless, but he was aware of this fact. Artpe didn't hesitate. He roughly mussed up Maetel's hair. She wasn't showing any signs of feeling pain from her wound. Artpe once again nodded his head then he spoke.

"Before we do that, let's collect our loot."

“Yes!”

The reward was more important than the battle! The heroes were growing splendidly in terms of materialistic possessions.

Chapter 10

Growth of the Heroes (2)

Maetel had been the one to finish off the Skeleton Warrior, but in reality, Artpe had basically killed it on his own. Of course, the act of running from the 6th floor to the 1st floor counted towards the Battle Contribution, but there was no doubt that Artpe would be getting the higher portion of the EXP.

Artpe's level went up by 6 thanks to the EXP. He climbed to level 30. Maetel's level rose by 3, so she was now level 32. The large level gap between them had closed somewhat

"How's your wound, Maetel?"

"My wound has gotten better after I leveled up. If we don't get into a fierce battle, I'm confident it won't overtax me."

"What about the grass you used before?"

"I still have some."

Artpe created an emergency medicine with the help of Maetel. After taking off her armor, he treated her remaining wounds. When Maetel exposed her bare skin, her cheeks had turned red. However, Artpe didn't say anything as he had a serious light in his eyes.

"All right. Let's put on some bandages then you can put your clothes back on."

"Those bandages been left inside the wooden chest for a very long time, so why is it new?"

"This is just the way of the universe. Just accept it."

"Yes!"

The first aid was done, and the only thing left was the most enjoyable part of a battle. It was time for him to check the loot. Artpe cautiously reached out towards the red

bone gauntlet. He read it with his Read All Creation ability, and words started to take shape.

[Crimson Rage Bone Gauntlet]

[The Undead had been in existence for numerous years, and a good amount of magical energy had been distilled into the bones of the Undead. A powerful rage felt right before its death formed differentiated an artifact. The item is very hard, and when the wearer is able to control one's emotions, one's power will be boosted by 20%. As a price, a fixed portion of one's magical energy will be consumed.]

"Mmmmm."

"What's wrong, Artpe?"

This drop item pretty much held the essence of the Skeleton Warrior. Artpe let out a sigh of regret as he looked at it. It had the basic requirements of a defensive gear. It had sheer solidity, and while it did consume magical energy, it could increase one's strength by 20%. It was a hard to acquire artifact of this quality when one considered their level.

However...

'I hoped an artifact that would be of help to me would show up. However, this was a warrior type Elite, so it can't be helped.'

Maetel had already acquired the bastard sword used by the Skeleton Warrior. He checked it with his Read All ability, but the bastard sword didn't have a special option. Still, it was able to absorb magical energy pretty well. Its strength, durability and energy was that of a unique artifact. At the very least, one wouldn't need to change this equipment until level 100.

In this context, the gauntlet would now be in the possession of Maetel. It was hard to do such simplistic comparisons, but it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that she would become twice as strong with this item equipped.

It was good news for him that she would become more powerful. On the other hand, he couldn't help, but feel like crap. The curse he had possessed in his previous profession as one of the Four Heavenly King had followed him here! It stubbornly stuck to him!

“Tsk. It can't be helped. You should wear this, Maetel.”

“What about Artpe...?”

“If something I need appears, it won't matter if you beg or cry. I'll ruthlessly push you away to keep that item. So don't worry about taking this item.”

“Yes!”

Maetel equipped the bone gauntlet. It was made out of bones, but it was an artifact infused with power magical energy. It reduced in size to fit her limbs. It wrapped tightly around her wrists and fingers.

Of course, if Maetel was unable to handle Mana, she wouldn't have been able to equip this artifact. However, she was a character, who had been able to bring out fire from the wooden branch at level 1. The worries about such a requirement could be omitted.

“Wow. This feels incredibly sturdy! I can feel it protecting me!”

“In truth, the bones are filled with resentment. However, if you feel such a sentiment coming from it, who am I to say otherwise?”

It looked a bit terrifying, but it was something befitting a warrior. Artpe smirked when he saw the animated Maetel, who was excited to have a new equipment. Then he gathered the other red bone fragments. There were a lot of magical energy stored within the bone fragments, so he could probably create something with them.

“Next is... Ah. It's the shield.”

When the Skeleton Warrior held it in its hand, it looked like a one handed bastard sword. However, when the 12 year old Maetel held it up, it looked like a claymore. The sword looked enormous in her hands. Naturally, she couldn't afford to hold the shield alongside the sword.

“I don't want a shield!”

“This is an artifact too. If you attack an enemy with the corner edge of the shield, it inflicts a weakening curse...”

The Skeleton Warrior hadn't had the chance to use its shield, but this artifact was

much better than the bastard sword! The Skeleton Warrior probably blew a fuse when it wasn't able to use the shield. On top of that, a crack had even formed on the shield. Of course, that wasn't Artpe's problem.

Since she couldn't carry it around with her hands, he proposed an idea where he would strap the shield to her back. However, Maetel hated that idea. It would slow her down if the heavy shield was strapped to her back. It would be better for her to preserve her speed, so she could evade the enemy's attack. Still, it was a waste to just throw away the shield...

"Tsk. It can't be helped. It'll be a worse option than you using it, but... I'll use it."

In the end, Artpe equipped the shield on his back. He had gathered strips of leather as he went through the Dungeon, and he had infused Mana to strengthen them. He created a hole on each side of the shield, and he threaded the strip of leather through the holes. One end of the strap was brought over his left shoulder and the other end was brought underneath his right armpit. He tied it off. Artpe looked like a turtle.

Maetel gently screwed up her eyes as she looked at Artpe move around.

"You are usually slow, but now you became much slower."

"There is a reason why I'm carrying it like this. I'll move around slowly, but at the most crucial moment, I'll unravel the straps. Boom! The heavy shield will let out a loud sound as it falls to the floor. It will startle our opponent."

"Aht! That's amazing! It'll look very cool!"

"If I drop it on a surface that breaks into fragments like marble slabs, the visual effect would be twice as more effective. You should remember this."

"Yes!"

He had gathered everything that needed to be gathered. They had to once again travel from the 1st floor to the 6th floor. On the way down, they had to defeat the losers, who had given up on chasing them. These were the Skeletons, who broke away from the Skeleton Warrior. It would be easy to crush them, and the two of them tried to do just that.

They tried.

“Huh.”

“Something has changed, Artpe.”

“You are right. Something has clearly changed.”

Everything was the same until the 5th floor. It was the Dungeon they remembered. The staircases were still broken, and the Skeletons were heaped up in a pile like pieces of trash to bridge the floors. The poor Skeletons were barely alive.

As an act of mercy and a way to increase the party's level, they killed all the Skeletons in the pile as they descended each floor. However, when they stood in front of the staircase leading towards the 6th floor, the two heroes finally realized something was wrong.

“This... It is made out of marble.”

Artpe mumbled in an agitated manner. Artpe took in the sight of a long and wide staircase. He was sure he had destroyed this staircase before when he went up to the 5th floor. Moreover, the staircase had evolved!? It was now made out of marble. Then there was the large hallway that was absent from his memories!

“Marble? So Artpe is going to drop your shield here?”

“I've only been carrying this for an hour.”

The Skeleton Warrior, who was basically the ruler of the 6th floor, had been killed. It seemed the Dungeon had gone through a fundamental change. He regretted the fact that he hadn't been able to use his Read All Creation ability on the Skeleton Warrior before it died.

“I'm looking at it with my Read All Creation ability, but... That's to be expected.”

His Read All Creation ability was able to reveal all secrets, but he was just observing the marbles that made up the Dungeon. He couldn't gain all information regarding the Dungeon through this method. It might be possible if he went into the deepest part of the Dungeon to observe the Dungeon's Core. Maetel carefully asked a question as she looked at Artpe's dismayed expression.

“What shall we do, Artpe?”

“We’ve already decided what we’ll do. We are moving forward.”

“.....yes!”

“However, you shouldn’t relax too much. The traps are now gone, but that might actually mean...”

He was now afraid of the monsters that’ll appear inside the Dungeon from now on. The traps weren’t being deployed to whittle down the adventurers anymore. It meant that there would be numerous monsters powerful enough to take down the adventurers without the help of traps.

“I don't care what comes out. I'll most definitely protect Artpe.”

“You don’t need to put on such a grim expression... Whatever.”

They hardened their resolves as they descended down the marble staircase. They entered a completely different 6th floor, and there weren’t any monsters in the front. It was the same in the middle part. They kept checking their surrounding as they nervously went down the hallway. After an indeterminate amount of time, they had reached the location where they had met the Elite Skeleton Warrior.

Up until now, the marble floor held nothing. However, four white skulled Skeletons popped up from the floor. They were colored the same as the marble floor.

[Do you want to go forward?]

[Do you want to retreat?]

[Do you want to protect?]

[Do you want to cut?]

“Step back, Artpe!”

“I’m already doing that, so you don’t have to say it!”

They were mere Skeletons, yet they were wearing pretty good leather armor. They also carried gleaming longswords. They moved as if they had coordinated a plan beforehand. They approached Maetel from both sides. Artpe used his Read All

Creation ability, and he moaned when he realized the monsters were all close to being level 50.

“The difficulty of the Dungeon rose sharply.....!”

“It’s all right... I can do this now!”

Maetel used her ridiculously fast reflexes and her good eyesight. She was doing it at a very slim margin, but she deflected all four longswords in order. Then she retreated a little bit, and she hardened her expression.

“Hmmp!”

In the next moment, the Bone Gauntlet let out a faint red light, and it added strength to Maetel’s slim arms. Artpe had explained to her that a boost in her emotions could bring out the ability of the artifact. However, he had never expected her to be able to control her emotions so freely!

He was well aware of her talent, yet even he was overwhelmed by this sight.

“You.....”

“I’m going!”

[You move forward.]

[You try to protect someone.]

[Your mental vision is still narrow.]

[You have enough courage to be recognized.]

“Shuuuuuuut upppppppp!”

Maetel bravely swung her bastard sword, and it impacted on the longsword of the Skeleton nearest her. The bastard sword easily broke the longsword in half.

She used her momentum to plant her right foot into the ground as she spun. She struck the Skeleton’s body with her forearm. When the Skeleton felt the weight of its longsword disappear, it lost its balance. The strike sent the Skeleton towards its

comrades, who was also swinging their longswords. The longswords impacted on the body of the first Skeleton.

However, unlike the Elite Skeleton Warrior from before, these Skeletons gave praise even as they suffered under her attack.

[You have the wisdom to use the enemy's power against them.]

[Your ability to make quick judgement is admirable.]

"Eh-eet."

Artpe wouldn't just standby as the bastards gave their monologue! When the Skeletons got in each other's way, Artpe didn't miss the opportunity. He attacked them.

He was overflowing with weapons he could throw! He had used all the Mana he had gained when he reached level 30. He had reinforced the daggers and bone fragments. He threw them towards the Skeletons, who were attacking Maetel. He stopped them in their tracks.

[Kooh-ahk!?!]

[However, you don't play fair. You hide in safety as you stick out your tongue!]

"The four of you are attacking her, yet you are talking about fairness? Are you trying to test the hero or are you trying to scout for the Demon King's army? Huh?"

In his previous life, he had been exceptionally skilled. After entering this Dungeon, he had only done one thing. His ability to throw items were on a whole different level now.

His thrown weapons all embedded themselves in their weak points. His timing was exquisite. He was able to stop the movements of his enemies. In terms of throwing skills, he was so skilled that a thief might not be needed for this party.

His main job was supposed to be a magician!

'When I became a hero, it seems I unnecessarily picked up abilities of other disciplines...'

It was a good thing, so why was he sighing?

He was sure of this, but if he checked his Read All Creation ability, his throw skill probably exceeded level 8. It was something very incredible, since Maetel's Swordsmanship skill remained at level 6!

[I accept my loss, but before you defeat the others... Kook]

"One down!"

While Artpe became confused about his own identity, Maetel had finally taken down a Skeleton. One was defeated, yet the EXP of the two heroes didn't rise.

"All right. Let's take care of the rest..."

[Your tribulation will start now.]

"They are speaking some bullshit, Maetel... Huh?"

At that moment, Artpe's Read All Creation ability was activated.

It was as if the fallen Skeleton hadn't existed in the first place. The fallen Skeleton melted into the void, and the energy from it was split threeways. It flowed into the three remaining Skeletons. As this occurred, Artpe was seeing a live update on what was occurring.

[Experience Record Strength Mana Transfer]

[Evolution Test Task Status]

At a glance, the words looked to have nothing to do with each other. It looked to be a list of words. However, it was enough of a clue for Artpe to realize what was going on!

"Shit...! Step aside for a little bit, Maetel! The stone and nature proceeds to return to stone and nature! It will be beyond one's reach!"

He desperately chanted his magic spell. The three Skeletons were attacking a bit faster than before when the marble floor turned slippery. They fell to the floor. Artpe didn't stop there. He started unraveling the leather strap tying the shield to his back.

"Artpe!?"

“Didn’t I tell you how I’ll use this earlier, Maetel?”

“Yes.”

“I lied!”

Artpe grabbed the end of the strap and he swung it. High quality Mana was emitted from his heart, and it flowed down through the strap. The Mana flowed into the shield. This task was arduous for him even if he was using both hands. In a flash, he sent the shield flying forward.

The shield flew in an exquisite trajectory. Artpe’s Mana within the shield was letting out a ominous light. the Skeletons were getting up when the shield hit them.

[Koo-ahhhhhhhk!]

[You are cheap! You are a coward!]

“I’m less cheap than you guys, you assholes!”

Artpe had reinforced the shield with his magical energy, and it had brilliantly caused a curse to be afflicted on the Skeletons. It was a simple curse that slowed down the movement of the enemies, but it was like a blessing that allowed them to turn the table of the battle! This was especially true when one considered Maetel’s quick movements.

Maetel’s eyes shone as she tried to finish them off. Artpe became frightened as he stopped her.

“Don’t kill them!”

“Why?”

“If we kill them, the other monsters will become strengthened. A Record Link was placed on all the monsters within this Dungeon!”

“Huh.....?”

Maetel didn’t understand Artpe’s words. She didn’t comprehend how serious of a situation this was. The ‘Record Link’ was a sophisticated trap that would unfold from

now on. The thought it made him grind his teeth!

“Anyways, the curse was strengthened, and I was able to lay it on them. You should charge in and beat them within an inch of their lives!”

“All right!”

[Kook, cowards. You should attempt this trial in a fair and square...]

“Shut up!”

While Maetel beat them to half death, Artpe turned around to look at the hallway. A steel door had appeared behind them, and the hallway behind them was hidden. When he confirmed the existence of this enormous door, he grinded his teeth.

It was as he had expected. It was impossible to back out now once they had started this.

‘I did make a resolve to break and steal whatever is in front of us.....’

Artpe looked forward, and he saw five new Skeletons appear down the hallway. They were all close to being level 50.

“Son of a bitch! At the very least, give us EXP!”

The heroes had fallen into a trial that was like a swamp. They wouldn’t be able to finish this easily.

Chapter 11

Growth of the Heroes (3)

Record Link.

It was classified as an ancient magic. It was a great magic that was representative of spells that were very troublesome to activate and maintain.

If one wanted to activate this magic, one needed souls and bodies that had similar mana pattern, skills and special characteristics. The resonance created allowed them to easily identify each other's intent. Moreover, if one of them died, all the power within its soul and body would be transferred to the others through the link.

In theory, if one killed the parts linked to the whole, the overall capability of the group would remain the same.

Up to this point, it sounded as if it was a technique that would allow one to create the strongest organization in this continent. However, the prerequisite of finding beings that were similar in mana pattern, techniques and special characteristics was fiendishly hard. In truth, no one was able to activate such magic throughout history.

Even if one was successful in activating it, there would be a horrific penalty if the will of one was slightly out of sync with the others. It would cancel the magic spell, and the horrible side effects would be shared by all. This was why this spell was designated as a forbidden spell throughout this continent. It was simply labeled as being an insane magic.

[Goo-ahhhhhhhhhhh!]

[Do this fair and square!]

[I want to be of help to my comrade, but I am unable to do that!]

These mad Skeletons had been linked through the forbidden spell. He never expected to find such a secret technique being used in a Dungeon placed in the countryside. Artpe was extremely shocked.

“Maetel! They can recover from broken bones, so I want you to completely crush their arms and legs! I want you to avoid killing them at all costs!”

“Understood! Eh-eet! Eh-eeeet!”

[Koo-ahhhhhhhh!]

Of course, he was taken aback by all of this, but he was able to keep his shock separate from what was going on in the battle.

The most important trait for the Demon King army’s Four was composure! The second most important trait was also composure! The best way to maintain composure was to go through all the scenarios beforehand. One had to think about what had yet to occur, and the consequences of each scenario. Composure was for those who planned ahead!

First, Artpe and Maetel made it impossible for the three Skeletons to move. After taking care of them, they confronted the five Skeletons running towards them.

“Bring it on!”

[Damn it! They aren’t doing the trial in a fair manner...]

“Huh? Five Skeletons gathered here to attack two children. I’m having a hard time taking those words seriously when it is coming from you guys.”

[.....]

The Skeletons looked taken aback when they saw their comrades roll around the floor in a pitiful state. However, they couldn’t do anything for them. The Record Link’s biggest restriction was the inability to attack one’s comrades.

“If we leave them in a state where they can’t die, we can block them from strengthening themselves. If we hadn’t known Record Link was being used, we would have been screwed. However, all tactical magic is useless in front of my Read All Creation ability!”

“As expected, Artpe is amazing!”

[Cowards!]

“You guys are almost past level 50, yet you are attacking us as a group! I don’t want to hear such words from you guys!”

The Skeletons had never expected two children under level 30 to have defeated the Elite Skeleton Warrior! Still, how could they start such a test in a ruthless manner! Which country’s customs were they following!

Artpe followed two cherished rules. First, he strove for tranquility. Secondly, he strove for survival. It was already much too late to follow his first rule. This was why he wouldn’t hesitate to cheat for survival!

“Break!”

“You have to cancel your buff before you run out of Mana! Control your emotions!”

“I know!”

She boosted her emotions to activate the strengthening option provided by the gauntlet. This was why she sounded more strained than usual.

Of course, it would be impossible for her to fight straight up against the level 50 Skeletons. It was self-evident that the buff from the gauntlet was allowing her to do so.....

‘She’s really amped up. Will she be able to terminate the buff when needed? If not..... ’

One had to always keep in mind that Mana was being consumed to maintain the buff. If one wasn’t able to calm one’s heart, the buff would remain active until one’s Mana ran out. When one was out of Mana, it started to consume one’s stamina. This was the reason why emotion type buffs were dangerous and tricky. If one overdid it, the buff could cause the user’s death.

It wouldn’t even be funny if the heroes died in such a trivial place. Artpe checked that more Skeletons were coming towards them. He hardened his resolve as he extended his Mana Thread. The only spell he possessed was Hyper Rubbing, and he had to get out of this danger by using what he possessed.

“I’ve taken down two of them!”

“You are beating them to the inch of their lives to make them incapable of battle. Let’s

coin a name for this action. Let us say we are shagging them. So you shagged two of them.”

“I shagged three! No, I shagged four!”

The struggles of the heroes had reached incredible heights! Artpe grabbed onto the leather strap as he sent the shield flying towards all directions. He inflicted the curse on the new Skeletons, who were trying to join the ongoing battle. Artpe had infused his power of Mana into the strap, so the tensile strength of the strap was high. He was also able to extend the length of the strap, so he didn’t need to worry about losing the shield!

“This isn’t magic. It feels like I’m in a circus... Shit.”

Still, the actual number of enemies unable to recklessly attack Maetel had grown to a significant number. The most surprising fact about shield’s curse was the fact that it could be ‘stacked’. The speed of the Skeleton became noticeably slower when it was hit multiple times with the shield. Their slow speed meant they were being taken down quickly.

Artpe started to revise his opinion. Maybe the biggest treasure left behind by the Skeleton Warrior wasn’t the gauntlet or the bastard sword. It might be the shield. This was also why the Skeletons refused to acknowledge Artpe as a ‘challenger’ for their test.

[You are a coward, who hides behind a woman! We should kill such a male first!]

[He doesn’t have the right to take this test! Punish him! Punish him!]

“Nooooooooobody will lay a finger on Artpe!”

Ah, they were screwed. Maetel was supposed to calm herself down, but their words made her emotions spiral out of control!

She possessed supreme talent. She possessed a superior body compared to beings of same level as her. She possessed an overwhelming amount of magical energy compared to others. Still, it would be dangerous for her to maintain her buff at this pace.

Despite this fact, she bravely leapt around as she took down the Skeletons...

‘She won’t be able to last long... Her ability is great, but she’s committing all the common mistakes committed by beginner users.’

Her immature nature right now suited the hero’s personality, but she was with him now. Artpe wouldn’t allow were to act in such naive manner. However, there were too many Skeletons running towards them from the other side of the hallway. He didn’t have the time to lecture her.

‘If so...’

The next best option was to make sure her Mana didn’t run out. This would prevent the buff’s side effect from manifesting within her.

So what was his options? Mana potion?

Unfortunately, this Dungeon didn’t drop expensive potions that would allow her to recover her Mana.

What about Mana recovery herb? Of course, there were rare cases where Mana herb grew in the corners of a Dungeon. However, this Dungeon hadn’t had any.

This meant that he had to consider his last option. It was Mana transfer. Artpe was overflowing with Mana.(He possessed Magical talent that would never be seen again in the human race. His body was ridiculous.) He just had to find a way to transfer it to Maetel.

This would allow Maetel to maintain her buff, and he wouldn’t have to waste Mana on a spell like Hyper Rubbing. Of course, if this was easily done, he would have done it already.

‘There are magic that allows one to transfer Mana to others, but I haven’t learned those spells yet.’

In the end, he would have to directly control his Mana to be able to inject it into Maetel. At this rate, Artpe might develop a new Mana Control Class never before seen in history. As he mulled over the new questions about his own identity, he grabbed a Mana Thread with his free hand. His other hand was holding onto the leather strap of the shield.

“Maetel! I want you to decrease your movement radius!”

“All right! I shagged two!”

Maetel shouted with great vigor. She swung her bastard sword as it impacted three Skeletons. Their bodies were severely damaged. It made one think that they would be better off dead. In a short amount of time, she had quickly gotten used to using the bastard sword. This truth was self evident.

Artpe shot out his Mana Thread towards Maetel, and it gently touched her shoulder. Artpe had never tried Mana transfer before, so he focused his mind as he tried to inject his Mana into her. Sure enough, the Mana wasn't easily absorbed by Maetel. It dissipated in the middle of the process.

He had delivered Mana to Maetel, but it hadn't bolstered her Mana reserve. His magical energy had basically gave her a shoulder massage!

“I shagged three again! Eh-hee hee. You are tickling me, Artpe.”

“Stop liking it so much. You are annoying me.”

Artpe continuously threw and received his shield with one hand. (He didn't know the cause behind it, but once the shield returned, it was sent out at a higher speed and strength than the previous throw. He was coming close to taking down as many enemies as Maetel.) He used his other hand to continuously send the Mana Thread towards Maetel.

Fail, fail and fail.

If things progressed as is, he wouldn't become more proficient at Mana transfer. He would become more proficient at giving Maetel a massage!

“Artpe is really amazing!”

“The fact that your heart is always in the right place makes this much more annoying!”

He couldn't waste his Mana like this.

Would it be more advantageous to take down the Skeletons using Hyper Rubbing?

Artpe was having such thoughts as he turned his head. The number of broken Skeletons were rising. There were almost 50 of them. It was at this moment when he

realized something. The more shocking news was that over 20 Skeletons had appeared once again at the end of the hall!

“What the heck! You guys should just come at us all at once!”

[I’m coming for you.]

[I’m also coming for you.]

[We are coming for you.]

It was as if they had been waiting for Artpe’s words. He watched as the Skeletons surged towards him. When he confirmed this sight, he politely took back his words.

“No. Don’t come here. You don’t have to come toward us.”

[We’ll take up our bows to kill the coward!]

“Oh shit.”

“Koo-ooh... I won’t lose! I’ll protect Artpe!”

Skeletons, who were able to attack from a distance, had appeared. It was a sufficiently demoralizing sight. To add insult to injury, Maetel’s Mana was starting to show signs of running out! A good amount of red light was starting to emanate in vaporous form from her body. It was evidence that the skill was consuming her stamina instead of her magical energy.

“You are going to kill yourself, Maetel! You idiot!”

“I’ll end this soon. I’ll end all of them. I won’t allow any of you to approach Artpe!”

[You cannot differentiate between bravery and foolhardiness. You aren’t qualified to be a hero either.]

[You are unqualified. An unqualified person cannot leave this test alive.]

[It has been a long time since anyone had challenged us. It makes us happy, but we have to do our work.]

“Maetel! Eeek! I told you to stop, Maetel!”

“Koo-oohk, Koo-ooh-ahhhhhhhh!”

Artpe kept yelling at Maetel to cancel her buff, but Maetel wasn't showing any signs of letting up. In truth, her actions weren't wrong. Her level hadn't risen, and the gauntlet's buff was the only reason why she was able to fight head on with the Skeletons!

When the buff ended, it would be the end for the the two of them. Instead of retreating, they had chosen to go forward. They had acted with reckless bravado.

‘Shit. This won't do. I can't transfer my Mana to her. Moreover, it would be foolhardy to expect her to learn Mana Drain or Stamina Drain as if it was a miracle... Fuck these inflexible Skeletons. What shall I do... Uh?’

This was the moment when he found a clue that would help him solve this situation. He hadn't discovered anything new, but he caught sight of the Record Link's Mana stem connecting the Skeletons. It was the cause of their current troubles, and he suddenly saw it in new light.

‘The Record Link is a spell that synchronizes everything. Of course, this spell moves towards completion as the members of the Record Link is killed. Isn't the activation method of this spell what I'm trying to accomplish?’

He had a moment of enlightenment. Of course, this was possible only because Artpe had a cheat-like ability called the Read All Creation. Artpe had to get out of this ridiculous situation, and his brain moved in a flexible manner to come up with a solution.

‘If I do this right, I'll be able to do it.’

The main idea behind the Record Link was a connection established using a specific resonance frequency. There was a big commonality between Artpe and Maetel that could be used as a medium. They were the only two people in the world, who had the Hero Class. This was something they shared between the two of them.

‘The Hero Class is an intrinsic characteristic that trumps all others. It's possible. I'll be able to do this... ’

Artpe's eyes were shining brightly. At that moment, he realized he had learned a new magic.

He had thought acquiring skills, which was incongruent with one's level, was something only a genius like Maetel was allowed to do. However, he had been wrong. He wasn't sure if his prior knowledge and observations helped in the process, but Artpe was able to join Maetel's company as being someone capable of creating new skills!

"Maetel! Your senses might expand a little bit, and your Mana will become amplified. Stay focused!"

"I understand...!"

As expected, her answer was always cheerful. She was well aware of the fact that her stamina was being consumed right now, but she refused to end her buff. Maetel was still bravely fighting off dozens of Skeletons.

Artpe was blocking the long range attacks using his shield, but if the situation remained the same, the two of them would be wiped out. He could guarantee it. He had to use his magic before it was too late.

"We are connected by traveling the same road. Reveal the line that connects us. Our sights view the same enemies. My rage shall become her rage, and it shall descend."

[The coward is trying to use a weird trick once again.]

[We have to stop him. We have to stop him, but...]

"Artpe... You can't touch him.....!"

Her anger kept rising everytime the Skeletons tried to aim for Artpe. Now it just took them mentioning Artpe's name to set her off. Her eyes were raised sharply, and she was more scarier than an evil spirit as she swung her sword.

There was a red fog emanating from her entire body now. She wasn't just consuming her Stamina anymore. She had learned a skill that was deadly and horrifying compared to all the Skills she had learned up until now.

[Maetel]

[Level : 32]

[Berserk Lv1]

‘Somehow I had a feeling she would... In the end, she learned the Berserk skill.’

It was an emblematic skill used by the Berserkers. It was the worst type of mental skill one could learn. The Berserk skill would make one kill everyone. It didn’t matter if one was an ally or a foe.

There was no level restriction in learning it, and it didn’t exist in the form of a Skill Book. The user had to fulfill requirement that were close to being diabolical to be able to learn it. This was why it was very rare to see it in action, yet Maetel had just learned it.

The Bone Gauntlet boosted the strength of the user as the user’s emotions was raised. The Berserk skill dealt with a single emotion called rage. It increased one’s attack by decreasing one’s defense. It was a very rare self-buff skill. Of course, the side effect was so much worse than the ones given by the bone gauntlet. It was so severe that it made one shudder.

“You’ll be fine even with that skill. Link the Mana!”

At that moment, Artpe finally completed his spell. This particular Mana Thread was very fine. One couldn’t even draw a comparison with the Mana Threads he had created before. This thread was letting out the five cardinal colors, and it created a direct line between Artpe’s heart and Maetel’s heart. The Skeletons couldn’t prevent the connection from forming.

“Ah.”

In the next moment, Maetel spoke in a peculiar voice. Artpe smiled when he confirmed that his magic had worked. The Skeletons shook when they saw the change in her spirit. They held an overwhelming number advantage, yet they started to slowly retreat.

“Artpe... is the best.”

Maetel mumbled her words. Artpe’s overflowing Mana was being poured into Maetel’s body in its entirety.

The stamina that had already been consumed did not recover, but her body was granted an extreme amount of Mana that her body wasn't allowed to possess at this stage. Her body temporarily took the next step forward.

[That person stole our secret technique.]

[No, that is... It might be superior than our technique.]

[My god... They are true heroes.]

[They are qualified to be heroes! They are brilliantly proving this fact!]

“Even if you acknowledge us now, you are too late.”

Maetel raised her head, and her eyes were sparkling. She hunched forward. All the muscles in her body was tense. She looked like a panther about to pounce its prey. The powerful magical energy and the overwhelming power of the Berserk Skill reconciled with each other to surround her entire body.

“I won't let you all run away!”

It was hard to call what happened next as a battle. It would be more appropriate to say they were hunted down by her.

Chapter 12

Growth of the Heroes (4)

[I've already acknowledged... Kuhk!]

[We'll back off for now, and the others will test...!]

"I told you I won't let you guys run awayyyyyyyyy!"

Artpe's Mana was being shared with Maetel, and she was like a predator that didn't get tired.

The Skeletons couldn't gauge Maetel's ability using her level. Still, they managed to come to the right decision. They expressed their intent on giving up on the battle. However, it was way too late to do so. Maetel's rage refused to diminish when she saw their shameless behavior. It actually increased it.

"You guys originally planned on killing Artpe! Now you want to admit defeat and retreat? You guys are mean. You are all very mean! I almost lost Artpe! You guys want to end this with just a single speech! You guys are really really mean!"

[There's no point. We told you there is no point in going further than this!]

[The hero's rage... Your rage will put you on a path of no return.....]

"You guys are the one, who will be put on a path of no return! Eeyahhhh!"

When one saw Maetel's outer appearance, one would assume she'll have a hard time lifting the huge bastard sword. However, the sword was moving freely in the hands of Maetel.

The white blade didn't discriminate between vertical and horizontal swings. She was like a salmon wading up a fierce current. She mercilessly sliced and crushed the bodies of the Skeletons.

Fortunately, she still had enough awareness to realize that she must not kill any of

them. She was basically holding onto a single thread of her reason.

It was something very hard to do even for Berserkers, who lived many years alongside their rage. However, Maetel was doing it.

“You are running around wildly like an idiot.....”

Artpe recovered his Mana, and he focused on sharing it with Maetel. Of course, Artpe’s Mana was on a different class compared to Maetel’s Mana. Even after supplying Mana required to sustain Maetel’s Berserk state, he was still overflowing with Mana.

After he became somewhat confident in maintaining the link, he gathered the sharp bone fragments in his surrounding. As he maintained the Mana link with her, he strengthened the bone fragments with Mana. Then he started attacking them from distance. Each throw incapacitated a Skeleton.

The two heroes once again started an airtight attack. They were facing a group of enemies that had increased in size by several dozen magnitude!

[I have no idea what is going on.]

[Why are there two heroes? Did these two really show up in the same era?]

[Our role is to conduct the test. That is it. It is our duty to guide them to the next location then we will back off.]

[However, at this rate...]

She dismantled the limbs of the most talkative Skeleton first. Maetel’s bastard sword was swung like a club, and she sent the disabled Skeletons into the corner of the hallway.

There was a pile consisting of 90 Skeletons.

Artpe made sure the Skeletons couldn’t recover. He mainly used his shield to dice them up. The shield was connected to Artpe by a strap reinforced by Mana, and it freely sliced through the air. It was like a boomerang.

[This is like...]

As the two heroes continued their dominance, a particular Skeleton was hit by Maetel's sword on its cheek bone. It let out a groan that wasn't actually a groan.

[It is as if we are the ones being tested.]

[This runs contrary to the point of this test.]

[Thus.]

[We will make changes.]

"Oh man. What is it again... Huh?"

At that moment, the Mana density within the Dungeon suddenly increased.

The hallway rolled as it widened. It became unfathomably large. Then he felt the Undead Mana from the other side increase in an uncontrolled manner. The walls kept contracting than expanding, and the flow of Mana within the Dungeon quickened.

"Kyahhh!"

An enormous change was occurring to the entire Dungeon. Maetel was taken aback. She broke out of the effects of her Berserk skill, and she turned to look at Artpe.

"What is going on, Artpe.....?"

"...I get it now. I've been firmly under a delusion."

He wasn't like Maetel. He wasn't afraid of the unknown. Before one knew it, a smile had appeared on Artpe's lips.

If a Demon, who was much more proficient in magic than him was here, this Demon would have realized it much earlier. However, it couldn't be helped, since he was the weakest amongst the Four Heavenly Kings.

Still, he had realized it before it was too late. That would be enough. He could straighten this out. This was what the power possessed by Artpe was for.

"The change of the Dungeon is ongoing. No, the Dungeon itself is trapped within a magic spell."

Who labeled this as a beginner's Dungeon? This Dungeon had been made to look sloppy on purpose. This was a genuine Dungeon. This couldn't have been formed naturally, and it wasn't something a regular person could make.

[We give the test.]

[If they are better... If they are more extraordinary... If they are overpowered... If they are geniuses...]

[We will send out everyone. We just have to test them again.]

The sound of marching could be heard. Several dozen level 50 Skeletons appeared from down the hallway. There were countless number of Skeletons readied behind them.

They came from the front, back, left and right. The hallway kept expanding, and it broke down the walls and stairways. The dead sleeping below were all awoken.

Every one of them were connected through the Record Link.

This was a very severe ordeal for beginner hero, who barely eclipsed level 30. However, she just fixed the grip on her bastard sword.

"It'll be alright, Artpe. I'll protect you. I'll crush them all. "

Her emerald colored eyes didn't shake at all. She was too brilliant and strong to be seen as a mere 12 year old girl.

Ah ah. Maybe this was the point where she would open her eyes as a true hero. Artpe grinned when he saw this, and he raised his gaze.

"Yes. Someone had planned all of this. I don't know which era this person was from....."

The Skeletons kept bringing up the subject of heroes. At this point, they were acting in a brutal and annoying manner as if they were bullies. Aside from their actions, he was sure they wanted to check the qualification of the heroes. This gave him a good idea, who might have designed this Dungeon.

"I'll crush you all so thoroughly that you won't be able to be recycled. I'll take everything that is yours."

His purple eyes contained the power of the Read All Creation ability. His eyes let out a light as he surveyed his surrounding.

A large scale ancient magic was protecting the entirety of the Dungeon. Their level of power wouldn't be able to do anything against it. It was a magic spell that changed depending on the situation. It changed to put the challengers up against a wall.

This was why it was time for Artpe to step forward. This was why they stood a chance of succeeding.

"Every magic has a structure, and all structures have weaknesses. Of course, it'll be difficult to instantaneously drive a wedge between the magic spell to break it....."

This magic continuously acted on a large space, and if even one thing went out of whack, the spell would come crumbling down.

Of course, it was known amongst mages that it was impossible to find the structure and the cracks within an ever changing magic spell. This widely accepted idea was turned on its head when Artpe Hirtana Kelduke of the Four Heavenly Kings appeared.

However, Artpe's name wasn't known to those in this era.

This was why no magic had yet been prepared to counteract against Artpe!

'Huh? Wait a moment. What happened to the me that should exist right now in this era? Am I absent or was I swapped with someone else? If that isn't the case, then...'

In a flash, he had a terrifying idea, but this wasn't the time to mull over those thoughts. He shook his head to expel all thoughts unrelated to their survival. Afterwards, he checked up on Maetel.

"Ooh-ohhhhhhhhhhhh! I can do this! I can do this!"

[Koo-gah-ahhhhhhhhk!]

Maetel didn't back down from the Skeletons coming from all sides. She ran wild. Artpe's reserve of Mana was too vast compared to his level, so her Mana usage didn't even make a dent in his Mana supply.

She didn't know how to retreat, and she had no fear. Instead of shying away from the

large number, she harassed them. She restricted the movement of the Skeletons.

It was as if she had been trained in personal and group battles for several dozen years. She was adept at it. The fact that she was doing all of this on instinct was the most startling fact in all of this.

“I won’t back away... I won’t forgive you guys...!”

[Koo-ahhhhhhk!]

[We need more! There aren’t enough of us!]

Above all, her sword strikes were slowly getting sharper and heavier.

Aside from the need to maintain the Berserk and the Bone Gauntlet, she wasn’t using any Mana. She was able to lightly dodge the Skeletons' swords, which were infused with their Mana. Each of her sword swing were able to crush the bones of opponents, who were 20 levels higher.

She made a lie of the common phrase that said a difference in level meant a difference in battle capability. Currently, a hero had been born on this continent, and she was easily jumping over her limits. It was as if she was mocking those who had to live within the restriction of levels.

Even if the Skeletons increased in number, they couldn’t overcome against a single slender girl. They grudgingly had to acknowledge her growth, and they despaired.

[Strong…… She shouldn’t be this strong, yet she is too powerful. In a situation where she should be retreating, she chose to charge straight ahead!]

[She shouldn’t be allowed to grow right now, so why is she growing stronger!]

[Maetel]

[Level - 32]

[Swordsmanship Lv7]

[Battle Step Lv6]

[Perception Lv8]

“Why? Her skills have increased.”

He was genius, who learned the Berserk skill after getting a taste of the Bone Gauntlet’s buff effect. She was in the early level 30s, yet she had achieved level 7 on a weapon skill. Achievements such as these were no longer surprising.

Artpe checked and confirmed that Maetel was barely receiving any wounds. He determined he didn’t need to monitor her constantly.

“For a little while, you should hold them off by yourself, Maetel. I think I’ll be able to change our situation by a little bit.”

“I believe in Artpe. Artpe can do it.”

Even if he hadn’t received her encouragement, he was confident he could do this...

Still, he felt a surge of energy from somewhere, and he wondered if the Link magic was the cause.

“Alright. Trust in me.”

Artpe lifted the corner of his mouth. As he laughed, he raised both his hands. The shield connected to the Mana strap rose into the air, and it started revolving around his body.

Even if he wasn’t able to inflict the curse unto the Skeletons, it was still possible for him to defend against their attacks.

“If a powerful magic spell was the only thing important about a mage, he would be called by the name of his strongest magic. However, there was a reason why mages don’t use that naming convention. The distinct name of a mage and their various talent they possess has importance.....”

A mage’s true worth didn’t come out when facing a single enemy using fire or ice.

A single gesture could change the tide of battle. A mage was only recorded in history when one could change the direction of the battle by oneself.

“I see it. I can see everything. I know where I’ll have to tweak.....”

The Dungeon was trying to compensate for the fact that there were two heroes. The standard requirement for this Dungeon was for one challenger, so the Dungeon was merging into a single floor to contend with them.

These Skeletons were only at level 50, but the ones afterwards would be higher in level. Moreover, they would also be connected through the Record Link.

It would be the end if he let that happen. Even if Maetel was a genius who could ignore level differences, there was a limit.

What should he do? He had sufficiently strengthened the abilities of Maetel. It would also be impossible for Artpe to personally grow right now.

This was why he had to turn the enemies and the battlefield on its head.

“If this was a regular structure, this should be impossible to do. However, the entire Dungeon is being controlled by a spell, so this is a different situation.”

Artpe’s purple eyes shone as they started to let out an odd luminescence. He could see all the Mana flowing from the Dungeon’s wall, hallway and ceiling.

He could see where they met, and he saw how it curved to change the structure of the Dungeon. He also could see how the Mana was being used over the monsters!

“Good.”

He had found it. Mana threads shot out from the tips of Artpe’s ten fingers. The Skeletons knew he was up to no good, but they also knew that they were lacking in ability to be able to touch the boy.

It was the damndest thing. Before Artpe stepped forward, he had made thorough preparations. No one would be able to interfere with him.

This was the result of the struggle of trying to escape the fact of being the weakest amongst the Four Heavenly Kings! He had always been sacrificed first before. However, he had had transitioned into being a hero now. The results he had gained from before was bearing fruit in a brilliant manner!

“This is easier than establishing the Mana Link. The fact that I can see your magic should be a terrifying reality for you guys... I’ll show it to you now.”

The 10 strands of Mana Threads from his fingers extended out towards the surrounding. The Mana Threads reached specific locations on the Dungeon’s hallway, ceiling and floor. Then the sharp ends of the Mana Thread started to bore in.

The vibration that was shaking the Dungeon became worse.

“Here, here and there.....”

[W... what are you doing!?!]

[Do you really think such a weak move could sever our connection!? Impossible! That is impossible!]

“You are right. It is impossible. I’ve barely reached level 30, and it isn’t as if I can cancel such a fucking old and large magic spell.”

However, there was one thing he could do.

Artpe let out an evil smile as he swung his two hands. The 10 Mana Threads undulated as they surged towards the wall, hallway and ceiling. They were absorbed into various locations.

[.....?]

[There was a change... No, there wasn’t any change...?]

The Dungeon stopped shaking. The ever-expanding hallway stopped expanding, and no new Skeletons appeared...

The Dungeon walls, which had disappeared, started to slowly grow back. The out of control Mana within the Dungeon calmed a little bit.

“Artpe... Nothing has changed?”

“Yes, Maetel. You made the correct observation.”

Artpe waved his hand at his surrounding. The protective shield, which had been

revolving around him, shot out towards a group of Skeletons.

Until a moment ago, new Skeletons had appeared every time when a group went down. It was an attempt to tire out the two heroes. However, one could no longer see the reinforcements.

“Ah. This is...!”

[Can it be...]

[Our connection to our comrades on the other side was severed. Our magic was reduced by the Dungeon’s power! This means he manipulated the magic spell... My god. How could such a young child do this!]

Maetel quickly realized what had occurred. The Skeletons were a step late in realizing it, and they started to talk noisily amongst themselves.

Artpe had expanded his magical senses, and he had encased the current hallway and the several hundred Skeletons within it. He spoke in a confident manner.

“Nothing will change from now on. Your reinforcements won’t be coming.”

It was as if the reinforcement were gone. It wasn’t an easy task to erase one’s enemies from the face of this world using pure Mana.

Yes, they were still alive. Even now they were probably stamping their feet as they waited for their turn to come.

However, they would be waiting on the Dungeon’s next floor, which won’t open until all the Skeletons here were killed.

Chapter 13

The Link Between You and I (1)

At first, Artpe couldn't fathom how the Dungeon and Skeletons were connected through the Record Link.

However, it was simple once he understood it. From the beginning, the Record Link was over the entire Dungeon... To be more precise, when the requirement for destroying the Elite Skeleton Warrior was met, a field was placed over the Dungeon. Everything within the Dungeon was placed within its sphere of influence.

Usually, it was impossible to synchronize all the monsters, yet this method had allowed the impossible to become possible. This field also allowed the Dungeon's monsters to change the structure of the Dungeon using their will. They merged the separated space, and it allowed them to send forth countless number of monsters.

Artpe had realized this fact before it was too late. Of course, even if he realized it, there wasn't much he could do at this point in time.

It was normal to have no options in such a situation.

"However, I'm an abnormality."

Even if Artpe couldn't cancel the Record Link in its entirety, he could push and distort the enormous magic spell using his Mana. It was possible to cause a minute amount of change.

This was why he was using his Mana Control ability to its limit as he spliced small parts of the Record Link using his Mana. Then he rejoined the split ends in different configurations to set small restriction.

He tied off the part of the region considered to be the 6th floor of the Dungeons. Afterwards, he tied off the 7th floor, then he moved on to tie the next region below.....

This was why there was no change occurring to the Dungeon now. Of course, all the monsters on the same floor were still connected through the Record Link. However, at

the very least, the outer appearance of the Dungeon had returned to looking like any other normal Dungeon.

“The fact that it’ll be difficult to smash through this Dungeon hasn’t changed, but we no longer have to fear about our stamina running out by fighting against an unknown number of reinforcements. Moreover, the Record Link to the other Skeletons on the other floors was completely severed...”

“If it is as you’ve said, does this perhaps mean...”

“You are pretty quick on the uptake.”

Artpe met Maetel’s sparkling eyes, and he smirked.

“After we disable their ability to move, we can kill all of the Skeletons on this floor.”

The Skeletons here had been isolated from the others. The ridiculous concept that they couldn’t gain any EXP until they cleared the entire Dungeon was gone now. They would no longer have to suffer under such crazy and tortuous stricture.

They were still under the difficult restriction where they had to disable all the monsters on a single floor without killing the monsters. However, it didn’t feel onerous to the two heroes.

They’ll win. They will survive to become stronger. It didn’t matter who tried to test them.

He didn’t care about the reasons behind such tests. He would take them all. If he was at a test site, he would upend it. If he was in a prison, he would destroy it. If it was a kingdom, he would raze it to the ground.

“We aren’t obligated to play on a stage made by the enemy. Remember that, Maetel. The enemies should dance to our music. We are the ones that have to survive after defeating our enemies. It doesn’t matter if they call us cheap. They can even cuss us out for being the bad guys.”

This was the philosophy of survival developed by the Four Heavenly King Artpe Hirtana Kelduke of the Demon King’s army. In his previous life, he had merely been an extra that should have been killed off early in the story. However, he had been able to stay alive until the hero invaded the Demon King’s castle. This was the reason why.

In the end, he was dispatched by the radiant hero, but she was by his side now. Nothing would be impossible for the two of them. Even if it was impossible, they would make it possible.

“The fact that we survive is us winning. That is why we have to survive to win. The most important thing is our own survival. There is nothing worth more than that.”

“.....Yes...”

Maetel firmly nodded her head. Of course, she was born with a strong sense of justice. She was too innocent to understand the selfishness and spite he had developed by surviving through the long years.

Still, this would be enough. She wouldn't be easily swindled by others now. He had created a foundation he could build on.

[W... what the hell is this.]

[Koo-ahhhhhhhhhhh!]

The Skeletons were having a hard time accepting the fact that an outsider had changed the entire layout of the Dungeon. How long had they been waiting for this moment! How patient had they been! They had been eagerly waiting for this as they hated every moment of the wait!

They had even allowed themselves to become lowly Undead to protect this place. They had placed their worth in protecting the place. This was their shining moment, yet these little brats were treating them like trash! The little brats had spit on them! It was a twisted situation where they were being looked down on!

[This is wrong! They won't be able to prove their worth this way! They will only just get stronger!]

[You are making a mistake! You don't possess the necessary qualification!]

“You guys should all shut up. If this qualification involves us being accepted by such rotten Skeletons, I would rather not have it! I care not for it! Maetel!”

“None of you will be able to run away!”

His Magic was running smoothly, so he just had to focus on Maetel and his shield. Artpe was able to bolster Maetel's power as he freely controlled his shield. He attacked the flustered group of Skeletons.

[How can this... Koohk!]

[These bastards don't have the right to take the test. We'll kill you! We'll destroy you!]

The Skeletons had been shaken when an abnormality occurred in their Record Link, so they weren't able to properly react to the situation. However, they had now accepted the truth that they would have to defeat Artpe and Maetel with the troops on this floor. They strengthened the Record Link between each other, and they started actively attacking the two heroes.

Of course, Maetel was getting stronger even at this moment as she participated in the battle. This was why the Skeletons weren't in a favorable position.

It wasn't as if the Skeletons had gone easy on them from the beginning, because it was a test. Nothing would change from their adjusted attitude!

[Are you planning on imitating a boomerang with your shoddy shield? It is too heavy! It looks like a pig rolling across the ground!]

"What the hell are you looking at! That is only an after-image!"

[Koo-ahhhhhhk!]

He hadn't wanted to grow in this direction, but Artpe's ability to throw the shield... No, the ability to control it was growing in real time. He was providing Maetel with Mana. Was he receiving some of her stamina and reflexes in return?

Several dozen Mana Threads were extended from his one hand, and they were used to control the shield. The sharp edge of the shield, which could inflict the curse, was raised. It flew freely across the large hallway as it impacted the Skeletons' bodies in order. The damage it inflicted wasn't light.

"Here and here!"

[The bastard's shield is weakening us.]

[We have to catch and kill him. We have to kill...]

As time passed, Artpe's shield flew faster, and it rotated more sharply. He was inflicting damage on par with Maetel's bastard sword. The Skeletons had been afraid of Maetel, so they had been herded towards him. However, he was taking them down faster as time passed, and he finally realized something.

'What is this? What the hell is happening? I'm satisfied with just being able to push and keep others in check. What is the deal with this? How is it possible for me to dominate foes that are 20 levels higher than me? If I make a mistake, I might kill them outright... Moreover, I think the curse effect has gotten stronger.'

Artpe reflected on why this was so. He realized that the act of infusing Mana into the shield was slowly strengthening the shield's special characteristic.

This was on another level compared to simply infusing a rock in an attempt to make it explode. He had used his Mana to increase the performance of the Artifact at a fundamental level. Basically, he had used [Reinforcement].

In other words, it was a special rare Support type skill. He didn't have to say it out loud, but this was a hellishly difficult skill to learn.

'..... when and how did I learn this skill?'

What did he actually do to precipitate this? He had caused change on the Record Link casted on the entire Dungeon. He knew he had done a pretty good job, but this act and the reinforcing of the shield was part of an entirely different discipline.

The only thing else he had done was establishing the Mana link with Maetel. He had poured Mana into her, and he had busily thrown his shield around.

[Koo-ahhhhhhhhhhhh!]

[The shield... The shield is getting larger! It is starting to rotate!]

[Dodge it. The bastard isn't trying to kill us! He is just trying to inflict pain! The bastard is not a hero! He is the devil! His wickedness is almost on par with the Four Heavenly Kings under the Demon King!]

It was as if they knew about his past occupation as one of the Four Heavenly Kings.

The Skeletons kept spouting impudent words, so he thought about mowing them down with his shield.

‘I’m awakening to skills at a ridiculous level. This should only be possible for Maetel... Wait a moment. When I used the link on Maetel, maybe Mana wasn’t the only thing that was shared between us?’

His body was moving more swiftly, and he had easily acquired a skill he hadn’t possessed before. Maybe this spell didn’t simply link their Mana. He might have created something more grand.

At this point, he wanted to check his ability using his Read All Creation skill, and he was annoyed that he didn’t have the spare time to do so.

‘Still, if my theory is correct, Maetel’s aptitude is being shared with me.’

It was a very dangerous occurrence for him. Maetel was supposed to become the most brilliant hero in history using her talent. This talent was being shared with Artpe, who was of mediocre talents. This would throw a big wrench in his plan.

This would slow down Maetel’s growth, and there was a chance that Artpe might pass her. Then the enemy’s gaze might focus more on him. Something terrible such as that might occur to him!

If possible, he had planned on maintaining the Mana link indefinitely. However, this changed the story. After the battle ended, he would get a clear assessment of himself using his Read All Creation ability. Then he planned on severing the Mana link as soon as possible.

The brightest star had to be Maetel. Artpe didn’t want to shine brighter than her.

‘Basically, the act of emitting light is like a work out. I’m too lazy to work out... After I receive enough light from Maetel, I’ll just reflect the light. That will be sufficient.’

This was a mindset unbefitting of a hero. However, his previous occupation was being one of the Four Heavenly Kings, and he had always dreamed about living the life as a dairy farmer! He was able to come up with such possibilities, because he was Artpe!

Maetel didn’t even realize what was going through his thoughts. She diligently moved her body. Even now she was efficiently pulling Artpe’s bountiful Mana towards her for

her use. She was getting stronger even at this moment!

“Hoo-ahhhhhhhhhhhp!”

[Strong. They are too strong!]

[We need more reinforcement... Aht! We don't have any!]

[Maetel]

[Level : 32]

[Swordsmanship Lv8]

[Berserk Lv4]

[Mana Control Lv6]

“From the looks of it, it doesn't look like her talent had decreased at all.....”

Artpe mumbled bitterly as he waved his hand. The last reinforcement added before the 6th floor was isolated stepped forward. The highest level among the group was 55. They hesitatingly moved towards the two.

[You, who explore the domain of the impossible, shall face either creation or destruction at the end of this chaos. We will test your small body... kuhk!]

“Stop giving a monologue, and fight me!”

[How dareeeeeeeeeee you... Kah-ahk!]

The two heroes had a lot to think about, yet the Skeleton with an empty skull was spouting philosophical words! It was merely an extra, yet it was trying to act cool. Even if the creator forgave such actions, Artpe wouldn't forgive them!

“All of you fuck off! If you know what is good for you, you should separate your head from your body! Just roll around on the floor!”

[How dare you sully our noble resolve... Kahk!]

One Skeleton in particular was filled with rage. It had tried to speak, yet the edge of Artpe's shield impacted on its body. The Skeleton was thrown to the Dungeon's wall.

Even after impacting on the Skeleton, the shield didn't lose any momentum. It attacked three additional Skeletons. Then it violently revolved around Artpe to fend off the Skeletons trying to swing their swords towards him. The shield was even able to break their weapons.

"All right. This should be enough."

He would be able to prevail over this situation without asking a favor of Maetel. The Skeletons that had been crowding around him were mostly defeated. He nodded in satisfaction when he checked that less than 100 Skeletons were left.

[I will not open the way for such wicked beings!]

[We have to defeat them. I'll make them into Skeletons! They will be the same as us!]

"You can try."

"I'll do it! I'll defeat them all!"

He still had over half his Mana. He assessed the amount of Mana he had left against the number of Skeletons...

They could do this. He was sure of it.

They were the victors...

Chapter 14

The Link Between You and I (2)

A modicum amount of time had passed from that moment. It was a short amount of time where not even one hour had passed. It was also the moment in their lives where Artpe and Maetel had to focus the most.

Artpe was in a precarious situation where his Mana was about to bottom out, so he continued to keep a low profile. In the end, Maetel's Swordsmanship had reached level 9.....

The Skeletons, who were exhausted from battle, tried a new tactic where they purposefully tried to die through Maetel's attacks. However, Artpe intercepted them by throwing his shield into their abdomen. They were put out of the battle by the hard hits, and the only thing these Skeletons could do was roll around the floor.

Finally, Artpe felt himself reach his limit in terms of his body and Mana.

"Hoo-ooh. Koo-hoo-ooh...!"

"It is all done, Artpe!"

"Ggoo-oohk. All right.!"

Artpe was moments away from losing his consciousness. He was about to fall to the floor. However, a voice of an angel could be heard through Artpe's ears. Artpe gritted his teeth as he fought to stay up. He checked the state of the Dungeon.

It was as if hell had manifested on this floor.

[Goo-gahk, gah-gah-gahk.....]

[There is no way... I'll accept.....]

[Death... I only want an honorable death.....]

The number of Skeletons, who had died, was zero. The number of Skeletons capable of continuing the battle was also zero. The floor was a mess. It was hard to tell if the bones were ribs or spines. They were all just rolling around the floor.

The two heroes had taken down over 400 Skeletons, and it drove home the absurdity of the situation faced by the party of two.

“Are you ok, Artpe...?”

“I’m still alive but, you... Are you able to cancel your Berserk state?”

“..... yes!”

It was as she said. Her emotions started to calm after speaking those words. The red haze that had covered her entire body dissipated, and her Mana calmed. Artpe let out a bitter laugh at the sight.

Rage had swept over her, and her rage had paralyzed a portion of her rationality. He had been a little bit worried that she wouldn’t have been able to cancel her Berserk state. It might have led to an accident occurring...

It seemed his fears had been baseless.

Still, a wrong was a wrong even if the two of them survived the battle unharmed. First, he ended the Mana link with her. He narrowed his eyes as he spoke in a stern voice.

“Were you aware that you had learned a dangerous skill?”

“Yes. However, if I hadn’t maintained it, I thought Artpe would die...”

“Still, if you had died, all of this would have been for naught. If I survived while you died in this place, do you think I would have been happy?”

“Ah-oooh.”

When she heard Artpe’s cold voice, Maetel’s cheeks turned red, and she lowered her head. When he saw this sight, he finally took his ire down a peg.

It was easy to forget, but she was a beginner hero. She had picked up the sword less than a week ago. She was only a 12 year old girl. Yet she had somehow kept a hold on

her rationality as she maintained her Berserk skill. In truth, she deserved praise.

“The danger of using that skill is so high, because it is a skill that deals with an emotion. If you think of the skill as your absolute ally, it’ll come back as a blade that will plunge itself into your heart. I just want you to remember this fact. All right?”

“Y... yes. I’ll keep that in mind.”

“.....all right. Let’s finish this.”

In truth, he wanted to sit her down and give her a lecture. However, he worried his words would create an artificial ceiling for her talent, so he decided to leave it be.

“Hoohp.”

He violently pulled on the threads connected to the shield. The enormous shield fell from the air to destroy the skulls of the nearest Skeletons. All the Skeletons on the floor had already been inflicted with several layers of the shield’s curse, so they couldn’t put up any fight against the shield. They were broken into pieces.

[D... dead.]

[Our comrades were completely annihilated.....]

[Our power is getting stronger, but...]

“May I destroy all of them, Artpe?”

“Yes, you can destroy all of them.”

Artpe let out a kind laugh as he raised his hand again. The shield floated into the air as it followed his hand gesture. It stood on its edge, and it started to rotate in a violent manner. Maetel also squeezed out the remaining energy left in her tired body as she swung her bastard sword.

[Koo-ahk!]

[Koo-gah-gahk!]

[Regret.....]

Every time one Skeleton was killed the other Skeletons felt a surge of energy within their bodies. However, the only thing they could do with the abundance of energy was to rattle around the floor. Of course, as more Skeletons died, the defense of the remaining Skeletons also increased. The Skeletons couldn't even jump towards the two heroes to attack them, so the improvements being wrought on the Skeletons were meaningless.

"A single blow isn't enough to kill them. Eh-eet! Eh-eet!"

"There is a better way to do this, Maetel. You shouldn't unnecessarily harm your weapon's durability."

Artpe extended his Mana Threads, and he took control of the Skeletons, who couldn't put up much of a fight. He started bashing the skulls of Skeletons against each other.

He was able to smash and eliminate the Skeletons in an effective manner!

[Koo-ahhhhh!]

[You... You wicked bastards.....!]

He used the hardened skulls against each other! Although his past occupation was being one of the Four Heavenly Kings, he was displaying a level of ruthlessness that might exceed the Demon King!

"Artpe is amazing! This really is easier than breaking them with my sword!"

"Yes, it really is..."

The current hero was already a different person now. In her previous incarnation, Maetel had been a pure and innocent woman. He had seen her shed tears when one of the Four Heavenly Kings had died. She had been a virtuous woman. Now she was a girl, who was smashing Skeletons against each other!

Artpe realized how important early education was as he swung the skull. If someone saw the two, they wouldn't think they were heroes. They looked like great candidates to become the next Demon King.

Finally, the moment of truth arrived.

“These are the last ones, Artpe.”

“Look at how hard their skulls are. It is hard to call them as being Skeletons anymore. They are almost on the same rank as a Dullahan.”

[We want you to give us an honorable death...!]

The power of several hundred Skeletons were split between the two remaining Skeletons. The two skulls were the product of this process. They were so heavy and hard that one wondered if they could be used as weapons. Artpe was weak in strength, so he couldn't even lift the skulls. Maetel, who easily swung the bastard sword, was barely able to lift them.

As an experiment, she threw the skulls against the wall. The blameless wall cracked instead of the skulls. Artpe tilted his head in puzzlement when he saw this.

“I think it is comparable to a level 100.....?”

“So is it better to catch 400 level 50 Skeletons or one level 100 Skeleton? Which gives better EXP?”

“Of course, the former gives an overwhelmingly more EXP. Anyways, this magic wasn't meant to give its opponents EXP in such a manner.”

In terms of EXP, Artpe and Maetel was suffering a very huge loss through this venture.

If they had killed 400 normal level 50 Skeletons, they would have been strengthened by a ridiculous amount. However, if one looked at the outcome of this battle, it had been equivalent to killing a level 10 Skeleton.

“However, the world isn't only about EXP.”

When one defeated an enemy that was significantly higher in level, one's Achievement was recorded. It was something that followed one throughout one's lifetime.

If one defeated a level 70 enemy at level 50, the Achievement remained throughout one's lifetime. It had the effect of aiding the one, who had acquired the Achievement. Even if one faced an enemy of higher level at a later date, the effects of the Achievement won't weaken or disappear. It helped one fight the higher level enemy head-on. It even had an influence on the acquisition of skills, and the reward items that one acquired

from battling monsters.

“On top of it all, you can’t ignore the skill growth that occurs when you apply the finishing blow. Normally, a skill grows the more you use it. The other method to grow your skill is to kill an enemy using the skill. If you acquired the skill while fighting an enemy, the successful killing of the enemy allows the skill to grow once more.”

“Wow. Amazing.”

Of course, there was no adjustment if one wasn’t successful in killing the enemy. This was also true for running away or canceling the battle. The reason why this happened was unknown.

Someday, he’ll ask the question to the god, who had made this world. He’ll seize the bastard by the collar.

“The technical term for this phenomena is called Ruminatation.”

“Artpe knows everything!”

“I don’t know everything. I know what I know.”

While Maetel was asking questions and receiving answers from Artpe, she was bashing the two skulls against each other. Cracks were forming on the skulls. Her repetitive action was so mechanical that he felt goose bumps all over his body. Artpe took a small step backwards.

[I won’t forgive you. I will revive someday, and I will raise my sword in revenge against you guys!]

“Yes. Next Undead, please.”

“Hoo-oo..... This is the last one!”

Maetel let out a shout as she brought one skull against the other. At that moment, she gathered the small amount of Mana left inside her body into her arms. This single strike was more powerful than any of her previous blows. It cleanly pulverized both skulls. At the same time, it wouldn’t have surprised Artpe if she gained the Bash skill through this action.

Anyways, this was how all the monsters on the 6th floor were eradicated. The Mana and the Record had been gathered into a single bundle. It was finally released from the monsters, and it was given to the challengers.

“Ah-ooh.”

Maetel let out a short moan. Artpe had somewhat expected this so he kept his mouth shut, but it wasn't as if he was fine. It felt as if all their internal organs had been dislodged. They felt nausea sweep over them as if their internal organs were spinning around like a tornado.

“Artpe... This is.....”

“Endure it... It is the level up.”

“This is it? Koo-oo-oohk.”

[Maetel]

[Level : 34]

[Level : 35]

[Level : 36]

[Level : 37]

Artpe could see Maetel's information update in real time. His innate ability wasn't broken. Artpe was probably going through a similar situation as her right now.

The two Skeletons had been strengthened to the extreme, and their EXP was divided between two, who were in their early level 30s. Of course, their levels would increase in a flash. A level up strengthened the body and soul. They were going through about a dozen level ups, so it wasn't strange to see their bodies undergo an abrupt change.

“It hurts so much, Artpe.”

“Endure it. It'll pass soon.”

“Yes...!”

[Maetel]

[Level : 41]

Maetel's ability shone in this instance. Even if she received the same amount of EXP as others, she grew at a much faster pace. Artpe's pain was slowly ebbing away, but it seemed Maetel was still in distress.

When Artpe experienced his rapid level ups, he felt his Mana fill up in an instant. He took deep breaths as he monitored Maetel. Shortly, Maetel also let out a deep sigh as if she was expelling everything that had built up inside her. Then she sat down heavily.

"Level ups are really miraculous... I'm incredibly tired, yet I feel really strong..."

"Your existence seems to be most miraculous phenomena to me."

[Maetel]

[Level : 43]

[Swordsmanship Lv11]

[Mana Control Lv8]

[Berserk Lv7]

How could this information be about a girl, who picked up the sword only a week ago? Even a mercenary, who participated in battles for 10 years, would be unable to grow to this extent!

Artpe still didn't like the purpose behind this Dungeon, yet he had to grudgingly admit that it had been very helpful in radically maturing the hero. She had grown in skill by facing an amalgamation of monsters that resided on a single floor. What Achievement will she be able to gain if she faced a monster, who possessed the combined might of all the floors!

'Of course, it's a death sentence to carry out the original test.'

He still couldn't believe he was able to cause change to the Record Link. It really was a result that had risen out of his desperation. Artpe shook his head as he let out a bitter

laugh.

“The wall is opening, Artpe.”

“It is set-up to do so.”

They had gained control of the 6th floor of the Dungeon, so the Record Link placed on this floor was cancelled. When they descended to the 7th floor, they arrived at a small fountain. It was placed there as if to encourage the weary to rest at this spot. Artpe looked at Maetel, who let out a cheer. He smiled as he nodded his head.

“Don’t be fooled. It is poisoned water.”

“This Dungeon is really terrible!”

“You’ll be fine if you keep that attitude. There is nothing here you should trust in this damned place.”

Before Artpe could finish his words, a faint light started to emanate near the fountain. Artpe’s eyes twinkled when he discovered it.

“I’m sorry. Let me modify that statement. There is one person you can trust here.”

“Huh?”

The light disappeared, and in its place, a beautiful woman with a big cart appeared. Maetel tilted her head in confusion when she saw this stranger suddenly appear in front of them. Artpe grinned. He turned to look at Maetel as he spoke.

“I’m talking about the Dungeon Merchant.”

Chapter 15

The Link Between You and I (3)

“Hello, adventurers. I was dispatched by the Anywhere company. I am here to help your Dungeon exploration be as smooth and pleasant of an experience as it can be. I am a middleman. My name is Mycenae!”

She had smooth brown skin, and a notably ample bosom. The beautiful woman’s voice was clear as if a bell was ringing. She waved her hand as she spoke towards Artpe and Maetel.

Maetel instinctively pushed Artpe behind her, and she was about to raise her sword. Artpe smirked as he placed his hand on her shoulder.

“She isn’t an enemy, so don’t worry about it. According to their contract, they aren’t allowed to attack us first.”

“Contract?”

“It is a contract made with the god. It is sometimes called the Dungeon contract. Anyways, it is a contract that no one can break, so you don’t have to worry about it.”

“Artpe even knows about that. You are really amazing.”

“Oh my. Do you know about the Anywhere company?”

She surmised they were out of the ordinary, since the two kids were able to reach the depths of this Dungeon. However, she never expected him to have some general knowledge about her store!

Mycenae, who was the middleman from the Anywhere company, looked at Artpe with round eyes. Artpe snorted as he waved his hand.

“How dare you?”

Several dozen Mana threads were emitted from both sides, and they crossed paths.

There weren't any ill-intention behind her use of Mana, but it was indiscriminately broken up as it dissipated. He was able to declare this his words with impudence. All detection and inquiry magic was useless under his Read All Creation ability!

"Oh my!"

"Don't you try to get cute with me, merchant."

"Yes....."

Mycenae realized that her inquiry magic had been denied before it could even activate. She backed away in fright. She backed into the cart, and her bosom jiggled as if it was about to spill out.

Every man, who had the strength to raise a spoon, would have been instinctively drawn to her charming gesture. However, Artpe just spit on the ground.

"Hoong. You are an ajumma."

"W... what did you just say!?"

"You should be prepared to give us a 20% discount, ajumma. If you were able pull it off in secret, it would be fine. However, you have no excuse, since I found out. Right?"

"Kook.....!"

She had been a middleman for the Anywhere company for the past 100 years. She was a veteran of this industry. She never expected to be humiliated in her first meeting with this brat! Mycenae balled up her fist as they trembled.

Artpe turned his gaze away from her.

His gaze reached the two Skeletons, who had been enhanced to the extreme. Only pile of bone dusts was left behind as remains.

"All right. Let's do our looting first."

"Yes!"

"Huh, customer?"

“We’ll trade with you. Just wait there.”

Even if she set aside the brusque little man, the girl had completely ignored her. She felt a large crack form in her pride.

Who the hell were they! Unlike their appearances, why were they giving off a vibe of 20 year veteran Dungeon explorers!

“There really is only powders left behind. Still, it isn’t as if there are no other way to...”

“I tried to loot, but it didn’t work. What should I do in such a situation, Artpe?”

“All right. I’ll teach it to you, so you should pay close attention.”

Even as Mycenae's body shook, Artpe approached the two pile of bone dusts, and he extended his Mana Threads in abundance. Maetel stood by his side, and her head was tilted in confusion. He gave a friendly explanation.

“Of course, it does seem impossible to loot a monster that had been completely pulverized, but this isn’t the case if you have the ability to control Mana. Watch me.”

Mana Threads extended out of his hand, and they reached the two piles of bone dusts made out of two Skeletons. The piles reacted to the Mana Threads, and it started to clump into a single pile. Artpe moved his hand in various directions, and the process accelerated.

“Next, you have to do this...”

“Wow.”

When he severed the Mana Threads, the debris also stopped moving. It looked like a pile of ash. It was as if a vampire had been burned to death there.

“We just have to wait for the chosen items to come out. This is an easy method you can use if you acted rashly by burning remains of a monster. You should keep that in mind.”

“As expected, Artpe is amazing!”

“These customers are.....”

This Dungeon had been appealing enough to call her forth. The fact that these young adventurers were able to last inside this place was surprising, but it was much more surprising to see one of them use such advanced technique to loot the monsters.

While Mycenae was gawking at them, the looting process was coming to a end. It looked to be successful.

“Ah, Artpe. Something is emerging.”

“It is an arm warmer. Since you have the gauntlets, this one is mine.”

“Wow. A pretty crystal also came out!”

“There were too much excess magical energy from monsters gathered here. Since it couldn’t be collected naturally, it clumped together. Normally, it is used as ingredient for making magical tools. Mmmm. This isn’t an item that you can use.....”

“Artpe can have it all. I have the sword and the armor.”

Mmm. She was like an unwavering angel. Artpe let out a bitter laugh as he put the crystal away. Then he put on the arm warmers.

It was unknown as to why arm warmers made out of black leather was dropped by a Skeleton, but when he equipped it, it had a supplemental effect of increasing his hand speed. It wasn’t intentional, but this was the ideal equipment for Artpe, who had to use both his hands for battle.

“I can see something still shining there, Artpe.”

“Ah. I almost forgot about it.”

Since all the drops of Skeletons on this floor was gathered in one place, there would also be some money mixed inside the loot. He saw two pretty large gold coins. Artpe smirked as he picked them up.

“I anticipated a gold coin would come out, but I didn’t expect two. Nice.”

“Wahhhhh. They are pretty.”

This was the first time Maetel had seen gold coins in her lifetime. Her eyes twinkled

as she let out an exclamation. A gold coin was worth 100 times more than a silver coin. This wasn't something unique to Maetel. Even their town's chief would never be able to possess one in his lifetime.

"Normally, not all monsters over level 100 drop gold coins. This miraculous event occurred, because all our enemies were tied together by the Record Link. You should keep that in mind."

"All right!"

"Wait a moment, customer. Record Link? What is that?"

Even if she was a veteran middleman for the Dungeons, this didn't mean she knew everything about ancient magic. Of course, Artpe didn't answer the merchant's question. He finished his looting.

"We didn't gain any rewards that we can liquidate... Still, if we add the gold coins to the money we already have, I might be able manage a decent trade."

"What is it?"

"Wait a moment."

After Artpe made sure there weren't anything else he could take, he walked towards the Dungeon merchant he had been ignoring up until now. He moved towards Mycenae. Mycenae acted as if she had forgotten about the affront of being ignored up until now. She greeted him with a bright smile.

"Welcome, customer. Are you looking for a specific item?"

"One empty bottle"

"Y... you want an empty bottle?"

"Yes."

Mycenae and Artpe made eye contact. She tried her best to discern Artpe's inner thoughts, but he kept a sickeningly innocent expression on his face.

She knew he was up to something. However, a member of the Anywhere company

couldn't turn down a trade unless there was a special circumstance involved! It was the biggest taboo to turn down a trade! Mycenae felt uneasy as she took out an empty bottle from her cart.

"The price is 50 bronze coins."

"It is only a single empty bottle! Why is it so expensive!?"

"All Dungeon merchants are like this."

Artpe ignored Maetel, who was shocked. He took the empty bottle. Mycenae watched Artpe unstopper the bottle. She spoke with a worried tone in her voice.

"It seems you are trying to fill up the bottle with the water from the fountain. Shouldn't you check if the water is safe to drink first? It is a fundamental rule followed by all adventurers."

"I know. I already checked it."

"You already checked it!?"

"It originates in my heart to manifest in the shallow floor of the water. Peel off your despicable outer layer to reveal what lies inside!"

"W... what the hell!?"

While the middleman Mycenae expressed her dismay, Artpe finished his chant. It caused an enormous amount of friction to form at the middle of the fountain!

"Wa-ha-ha-ha. The water is boiling!"

"That's right. I'm wastefully using my Mana!"

The Hyper Rubbing spell was causing so much friction that it was vaporizing the cold water. He was now over level 40, and he was getting used to forming the Hyper Rubbing spell. The effectiveness of the magic was on a different level compared to before.

"Kyahhhhk, customer. If the water holds poison, it'll turn into a poisonous fog!"

“I already checked it!”

The steam covered them completely, but there was no poison within it. There were some poison that dissolved entirely in water, and it could have been vaporized alongside the water. On the other hand, there were poisons that didn't mix with the water. It would be left behind in place as sediment.

Of course, the poison within the fountain was the latter type. This was why Artpe didn't hesitate to evaporate the water.

“It is the first time I've heard of such a spell. If you wanted to boil the water, couldn't you have just used a fire type magic?”

“I did it, because I don't have such magic!”

“I'm currently selling the Boil spell for two gold. The fire spell is being sold at a great price of 1 gold!”

“I won't buy it!”

There were a lot of water inside the fountain, so it took a good amount of time for all of it to evaporate. After a long wait, the result came to fruition. The copious amount of water inside the water fountain had all evaporated, and on the floor, a dark green powder was left behind in a lump.

“Ah.”

“Hmmp.”

Artpe smirked when he saw Mycenae unconsciously let out a moan. He put the powder into the empty bottle. Of course, the identity of the powder was a form of poison. It was fine to touch it with one's bare hands. Its toxicity appeared only when it was mixed with a liquid, so it was safe to touch it right now.

“Ah.....”

“Well, are you going to buy this?”

Artpe didn't leave a single grain of the green powder behind. He stoppered the bottle, and he pushed it towards Mycenae. Her cheeks were puffed up as she started to argue

with Artpe.

“.....so you already know why the Dungeon Merchants appear in Dungeons?”

“Of course. You guys have designs on acquiring magical goods.”

When adventurers explore a Dungeon, they face danger and opportunity prepared by the Dungeon. One might find a hidden treasure box, a poisoned fountain or a pond made out of the highest quality holy water.

It was possible for the Dungeon Merchants to detect the energies of these treasures, and they appeared randomly in these Dungeons.

If an adventurer was unable to find the treasures, the Dungeon Merchants acquired the rights to take the unfound treasures. Around half the population considered to be adventurers were poor at detecting treasures on each floor.

Even if an adventurer knew why a Dungeon Merchant had appeared, the adventurer wouldn't be able to find the treasure unless they were very skilled. An adventurer could search the entirety of the Dungeon for treasures just based on the fact that a Dungeon Merchant had appeared, but the chance of finding the treasure was close to zero.

Of course, Artpe was an anomaly. Even before the Dungeon Merchant had appeared, he knew what was waiting for him at the end of the 6th floor. He had located everything, so there was nothing else to say. He grinned as he shook the bottle containing the green powder.

“So you aren't going to buy it?”

Mycenae's expression crumpled in distress, but her instinct as a merchant was soon brought to the fore.

“Koo-oohk... I'll buy it for 2 gold.”

“All right. I hope you meet a pushover next time, who will be easily deceived by you.”

Artpe turned around without hesitation, and Mycenae desperately reached out towards him.

“I’ll give you 4 gold! You have to factor in the processing cost! The processing cost!”

“I made sure there wasn’t a single drop of water remained. What processing fee? Give me 10 gold.”

“You are being heavy-handed...!”

“If you don’t buy it for 10 gold, there will be no trade.”

Artpe was firm. He was so resolute that it made one wonder if the creator, who made the boundaries between ocean and land, spoke in such a way in the past.

Mycenae knew that the person in front of her already knew the exact worth of the item within her hand. If so, what choice did she have? She had no choice, but to agree to his demand!

“I’ll buy it for 10 gold.”

“All right. Since you bought the Basilisk Venom Powder for the price of 10 gold, this isn’t a losing proposition for you.”

“You even knew the name.....”

At that moment, Mycenae decided to treat him like an experienced merchant. When one met a person like him, the fact that she didn’t take a loss was a form of victory!

Moreover, she would be able to gather information on a little-known adventurer on this continent. She would be able to gain massive profit from it.

“Next... I want you to repair our equipments.”

“Repair... All right. Huh? All your equipment are artifacts, but... Overall, you guys have pretty bad equipment. Does this mean that your levels are also.....?”

“I told you not to pry any further.”

It cost 50 silvers to repair all the equipment. He paid 40 silvers after receiving the 20% discount.

Mycenae never expected him to discount the price of the repair fee, but she also knew

she had acted rude in the first place. This was why she couldn't do anything about it.

"Next, I want boots and helmet for her. I want a robe. I want you to give me your best performing equipment with the lowest level restriction."

"I have boots and helmet made from the bones of a Blood Ketai. The two items will be worth 8 gold....."

"Since I'm receiving a 20% discount, I'll give you 6 gold and 30 silver. "

"Jeez. You should just give up on being an adventurer to become a merchant."

Maetel's lower extremities and head had been vulnerable compared to the other regions of her body. She now had defensive gears that could protect those regions. Artpe purchased a robe made out of a black fabric. The threads were knitted using the quills of the Darkness Hedgehog, which had the ability to manipulate magical energy. The robe increased one's Mana by a small amount, and it had a modest ability to obstruct other's perception. This was why he had to pay 6 golds for it.

In truth, these equipment weren't something that could be obtained by level 40s. The power of money was really great.

"There, Maetel. You should be pretty safe wearing these."

"Ah. Ah-ooh. It is so expensive. These expensive items are for me....."

The fact that Artpe had obtained 10 gold by selling a weird powder was already shocking in itself. Now that she saw so much gold being exchanged for their equipment, she became delirious.

"The cows we can buy with that much money... One, two three... Ooh-ahhhhh."

"Calm down, Maetel. Also, I want to purchase water and food with the remaining money, ajumma. Give me the cheapest ones."

"I'm not an ajumma! I'm a green spring girl!"

"If ajumma is a maiden, then I'm a hero."

"Ooh-ahhhhhhhhhh!"

Mycenae didn't know that Artpe was really a hero. She was infuriated when she saw his sly smile! However, the heroes weren't paying attention to her anymore.

"Ooh ooh. I don't like food that doesn't taste good....."

"A hard bread you eat right now will come back as tenderloin steak in the future. You have to be patient."

".....yes, I'll be patient! I'll wait until happiness comes to Artpe and I!"

"No, you don't have to wait that long."

Mycenae took the money pouch put forth by Artpe. She emptied it, then she started preparing the dry foods and water. Mycenae was dumbfounded as she heard Artpe placate Maetel.

"You guys act as if you've been clearing Dungeons for 20 years. You guys must have received fantastic training at home."

"None of your business."

He spoke in a brusque manner as he received the bag with dry foods and canteens containing water. After he put away the items inside his robe, he let out a sigh as he raised his head.

Mycenae somehow managed to regain her business smile. She gave him a cute smile, yet Artpe was apathetic. He shooed her off with his hand as he spoke to her.

"Well, you should go now. We'll probably meet again soon."

"I'll see my customers off from here!"

"Nope. Go. Ajumma has to leave, then I'll be able to take out the treasure chest you are standing on."

"....."

In the end, Mycenae sank to the floor.

She never expected him to be aware of it! She had endured all the humiliation up until

now as an attempt to get him to act careless. She even sold her wares at a very cheap price, yet at that moment, her plan went up in smoke!

Chapter 16

The Link Between You and I (4)

Mycenae tried her best to look pitiful as her eyes watered. She gave a request to Artpe. In truth, her main objective hadn't been the Basilisk Venom Powder. She was here for the treasure box.

"W... will you sell the content of this box to me?"

"I'll make the decision after seeing what's in it."

Artpe gave a cold reply. Moreover, his gaze was cold too. He was silently pressuring her. It was as if he was trying to tell her to quickly move her heavy body to the side! Mycenae's stunning beauty was on the same level as a pebble rolling around in the streets. It held no meaning to him!

"Kook..... This is the first time I've suffered such humiliations since I started working for the Anywhere company....."

"Wow! It's a treasure chest!"

An old pair of wood framed glasses and a pair of black leather boots appeared from within the treasure box. Mycenae's eyes once again shone with a fierce light!

"Are you going to sell it to me!?"

"I'll sell you only one of the two."

As he spoke those words, Artpe pushed the wood framed glasses towards her. Mycenae was able to confirm a suspicion she had.

"You must possess a tremendous observation magic."

"Didn't I tell you not to pry? Well, it is obvious at this point in time, but... Well, since I've been pretty heavy handed up until now, I'll sell it to you at a price where I won't see much profit. I want 45 gold."

“F... forty f.....!”

“I’ll buy it. Thank you very much.”

The magnitude of money being exchanged had suddenly changed, and Maetel was taken aback. However, Mycenae willingly paid the price! Maetel’s eyes were spinning.

Artpe had a grin on his face.

“As expected, Dungeons are honey pots. We just have to avoid being trapped and killed by the honey.”

“Customer. At the Anywhere company, we offer services ranging from providing support to escorting parties. If you need such services...”

“By doing so, you plan on taking half my loot as recompense? Dream on. Just give me my money.”

“Tsk.”

The wood framed glasses allowed one to probe the surroundings when the magic infused within the lenses was consumed. As the holder of the Read All Creation ability, Artpe had no need of this item. However, it was something all adventurers wanted when entering a Dungeon! Since the demand was high, the price was also high.

The most unfortunate aspect of this item was the fact that it could only be used a limited number of times. It disappeared after several uses. This was why consumable items were priced depending on their number of uses, and this was one of the reasons why this particular item was given a high price.

Mycenae had estimated the amount of Mana within the wood framed glasses, and she knew she could easily sell it for 50 to 60 golds at the minimum. She had a satisfied expression on her face as she put away the item into her cart. Her eyes were sparkling once again. Then her gaze landed on the black leather boots. They were letting out a sheen of a high grade item.

“Customer. I really want to purchase the boots.....”

“I’m not selling you this.”

Artpe answered flatly. He took off his worn-out shoes, and he put on the leather boots. Maetel clapped her hands. She said it looked good on him, but Artpe didn't care if it looked good or not. The only thing important to him was its performance.

"I never expected to find a pair of Blink Boots in this Dungeon."

"?"

She had known it was a rare item, but she never expected it to be the Blink Boots! Mycenae grinded her teeth. Maetel didn't know much about magic, so she innocently tilted her head in confusion.

Blink was a magic that allowed one to instantly travel a short distance. Magicians used this magic to get out of danger. Since it was a magic spell, it had the downside of needing a long cast time.

However, it was a completely different story if the magic spell was contained within an artifact. It only needed an infusion of Mana or a fulfillment of a specific condition to activate. This was why the effectiveness of this magic increased in a single stroke!

"This is why boots containing Blink Magic are worth 100 gold at the very least! It doesn't matter if the Mana efficiency of the item is low!"

"Amazing, Artpe!"

"Ooh-ahhhhhhhh!"

On top of it all, this pair of boots had an option of activating on its own during a moment of crisis. It could be used once a day without it consuming Mana. It was also possible to use it again by adding in more Mana. Amongst the boots with the Blink option, it wasn't an exaggeration to say that these ones were ranked in the highest class.

As a cherry on top, it had a low level requirement, so Artpe could equip it. For Artpe, good things came in threes. If he was to estimate the price of this pair of boots... It would be too annoying to come up with an estimate.

"Artpe will be safe now. I'm so happy."

"What is up with this customer...?"

“What do you think? She’s so innocent that she would never be able to become a merchant even after she grows up. So...”

Artpe returned the entirety of the 45 golds he received from Mycenae.

“I want one Mana potion and I want the rest to be Stamina potions.”

“Artpe! Are you using all of the money right now!? We could have lived off of that money! It would have lasted for our entire lifetime!”

“You have the ability to earn money whenever you want. Moreover... It is a good idea to buy items that might spare our lives”

Artpe spoke in a calm manner. Mycenae, who was facing him, smirked.

“In many ways, I have misjudged you. Please forgive my rudeness. I can give you 1 mid-grade Mana potion, and 8 Stamina potions. Will that be ok?”

“I’ll be thankful if you added an additional Stamina potion on top of that.”

“I’ll give you an additional Mana potion too.”

“Mmm?”

Artpe’s eyebrows furrowed.

“Aren’t you being a bit too generous?”

“She is being generous!?”

“I believe you will become famous in the future. I’m just trying to gain a little bit of favor in your eyes. Please look kindly on the Anywhere company in the future. Thank you in advance.”

“Tsk…….”

Mycenae laughed with unreadable eyes. She finally regained her composure as a middleman. Artpe didn’t like being in debt, but he was in a tight spot. He couldn’t punt her good intentions just because he wanted to.

In the end, Artpe accepted the potions without hesitation. He took two Mana potion and one Stamina potion for himself. After he put them away inside his robe, he put the rest in a pouch before giving it to Maetel.

“You should drink it when you are extremely tired, or you can spray it on your wounds.”

“Ah-ooooooooh. These are too expensive for me to use.”

“The most expensive thing in this world is your life. Will you be able to use it if I frame it that way?”

“Y... yes.....”

When Maetel heard Artpe’s manly words, her cheeks turned slightly red as she meekly accepted the pouch with the potions. Mycenae was still watching them as she smirked. She bowed her head as a farewell.

“I am Anywhere company's Mycenae. I’ll wait for the day when we’ll meet again.”

“Be my guest.”

“Goodbye for now.”

Mycenae disappeared alongside the same light that had appeared in the beginning. Maetel wondered if this was all a dream, so she pinched her own cheeks. When she realized she still had on a completely different set of items, she knew this was real. She shook her head.

“There are too many things I still don’t know.”

“That is to be expected. As recompense, your talent for battle is outstanding.”

“But I want to have conversations with Artpe about a lot of different subjects...”

“You want to talk more than this?”

Matel was already not listening to Artpe’s words. Instead, she was making a firm resolve as she clenched her fists.

“I’m going to do my best to read a lot of books from now on. I’ll become smart, so I can be of help to Artpe. I want to have many more conversations with Artpe...”

“Uh. Mmmm. All right. You do your best.”

He didn’t think it was a problem that could be solved by reading more books. Still, Artpe decided to cheer her on.

“Still, you should delay your plans on reading books. We’ll be entering the 7th floor of the Dungeon soon. The Skeletons will probably be stronger. If we don’t prepare our heart for what is to come, we’ll suffer defeat.”

“I can win against anyone. I’ll protect Artpe.”

“I like the fact that you are brave.”

He smirked as he stroked Maetel’s head. Then he plopped down on the floor. She tilted her head in confusion as she looked down at him. He announced his words in a solemn manner.

“We have to sleep first before we proceed.”

“Yes!”

They roughly rolled up a straw mat. They used it as a pillow as they laid down.

Even if a Record Link was placed over this location, a Dungeon was a Dungeon. After a certain amount of time, new monsters would appear once again on the 6th floor. Of course, these monsters would be under the influence of the Record Link since the spell was still over the entire Dungeon. If the act of killing it once could break the Record Link, Artpe wouldn’t have had so much trouble manipulating it in the first place.

Still, he was pretty sure the new monsters wouldn’t show up on the 6th floor while they slept through the night. As a precaution, he pushed his hand forward to place Mana Threads in various locations around them. Maetel waited for his work to be done, then she pulled herself slightly closer to Artpe. She lay next to him. Artpe frowned.

“You are too close.”

“I like this better, since it is warmer.”

“What happened to your shyness?”

“I buried it in my house’s backyard before I came here.”

“Your house doesn’t have a backyard.”

Maetel didn’t say any more words. She just snuggled closer to him. Since he couldn’t just push her away, he let her be.

“Heh heh.”

“You have a long way to go. A long way.....”

“Artpe~”

Maetel acted in a coquettish manner. It was hard to imagine that this girl had annihilated the Skeletons using the bastard sword. Her voice was that sweet. Artpe had made a resolve not to fall for her tricks, yet he found himself stroking her head.

She had been in battle all day, and she hadn’t had the chance to wash herself. He couldn’t understand how she smelled so good. Artpe wondered if it was because she was still young. Artpe mused about such nonsensical thoughts as he closed his eyes.

The Dungeon’s 7th floor turned out to be more difficult rather than being easier than the 6th floor. The monsters of the Dungeon had realized that Artpe had messed up the Dungeon’s test, and its rules. They no longer acted as if they were testing the two of them. The monsters were filled with the desire to punish them for sullyng the holy testing ground. This was why the monsters were more vicious in their attacks.

On top of that, the monsters on this floor was higher in level than the ones on the 6th floor. They had an average level of 52, and there were about 600 Skeletons in total. These monsters mainly targeted Artpe, so Artpe didn’t have the chance to build up his Mana.

[Your existence is an insult to all the heroes, who existed before you!]

[I cannot forgive you!]

“You won’t lay a hand on Artpe-ehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

They had smashed the Skeletons for a whole day, yet they weren’t able to clear the floor. Fortunately, their levels had increased, so they could hold out for two to four days.

If possible, Artpe didn't want Maetel to use Berserk. He didn’t want to use the Mana Link either. However, these weren’t foes they could beat by holding their powers back.

Maetel relied on her Berserk Skill to repel the Skeletons coming at them from all sides. Artpe had no choice, but to provide her with Mana. At the same time, he was using his shield. He was getting better at using it as time passed. He used the shield boomerang to weaken his enemies.

[Koo-hahhhhhhhhhhk!]

“Artpe! These gloves and boots are really good! The Skeletons are easy to break using these items!”

“Yes, yes.”

[Maetel]

[Level - 43]

[Unarmed Combat Lv1]

[Strike Lv3]

[Monsters! They are cruel monsters! They are demons!]

[Give me death! I will become one with my comrades to punish you all!]

“I’ll make all your comrades like you. Then I’ll break all of you at once. Wait a little bit!”

[Koo-ahhhhhhhhh!]

How much time had passed? Maetel and Artpe were entirely reliant on the Berserk skill and the Mana Link. They were barely able to beat all of the Skeletons.

Artpe felt the burden of knowing that he was probably weakening Maetel by sharing her talent. However, unlike his worries, all of Maetel's skills continued to evolve at a ridiculous pace. This was also true for Artpe.

Of course, it was impossible to last a couple of days using nothing. They had to use most of the potions they had purchased. Fortunately, they would once again encounter a Dungeon Merchant at the end of the 7th floor.

"Oh my. It has been only couple days, but we meet again."

"It's this ajumma again?"

"I'm not an ajumma!... huhk. Isn't that the Golden Lizard's Tailbone Great Sword!?"

"97 gold."

"Ggoo-ahhhhhhhhk!"

This was how the heroes were able to safely retool before they entered the 8th floor. Still, the Dungeon remained very difficult. Artpe wasn't the creator of this Dungeon, so he had no idea how many floors had been separated using the Record Link.

They moved through the Dungeon's 8th floor, 9th floor, 10th floor, 11th floor, 13th floor, 15th floor... The Dungeon continued to go on and on. The average level of the Skeletons continued to go up by a marginal amount, and at a certain point, Artpe and Maetel surpassed the level of the Skeletons.

Since they held the advantage in level, they thought they would be able to win easily from that point forward. Right when they had this thought, powerful monsters over level 100 started to appear. The monsters were called ghouls. The level difference between the party and the monsters widened in the favor of the monsters, so they were put in a difficult spot once again.

However, there weren't any mountains they couldn't overcome. Before they even engaged in a fight, Artpe was able to find all the weaknesses of his enemies. Then there was the the crazy talented Maetel, who could bring anything he ordered into reality!

This was how a period of one year had passed, and the party reached the Dungeon's 34th floor.

“How long is this Dungeon!”

“Group fights are fun, Artpe! Isn’t it about time for a different type of monsters to come out?”

“Customer! Please sell this to me for 200 gold just this one time! Please!”

At that point, Maetel had reached level 124. Artpe had reached level 115.

Chapter 17

Our Sunbae-nim Did This? (1)

Artpe headed down the stair leading towards the 35th floor. He grinded his teeth as the Dungeon shamelessly showed no signs of ending.

“What kind of Dungeon is this!?”

“Aren’t all Dungeons like this, Artpe?”

Maetel’s innocent eyes shone as she asked the question. She had drawn the short end of the stick by coming into this brutal Dungeon as her first Dungeon. However, she didn’t have the proper perspective to know any better. She didn’t get tired of this place, and she didn’t complain. She possessed an essential virtue needed as a Dungeon explorer...

“Mmm. What I’m trying to say is.....”

Artpe couldn’t tell if this was a good thing or not. Therefore, he evaded giving an answer by stroking her head. In turn, Maetel’s eyes narrowed in pleasure as if she was a cat. Mycenae had left behind her cart to look at them. She had a gentle look in her eyes as she spoke.

“It looks as if you are training an animal, customer.”

“Shut up. I want 245 gold.”

“You said you’ll sell it to me for 230 gold a moment ago!?”

“The price on items aren’t fixed. The price can fluctuate depending on my condition or if the other person is being rude. Let’s see... Right now it should be 247.....”

“Two hundred forty five gold! I’ll buy it!”

At this rate, Mycenae knew the price might increase further, so she quickly pushed the money towards him.

“Here.”

“Koo-oooooooooooooh.”

Artpe grinned as he handed her the item. Mycenae used her observation magic to check the item, and she let out a groan.

“Kook. As expected, it is a really good weapon... Your ability to price an item is really uncanny. It makes me want to recruit you into the Anywhere company.”

“You won’t steal Artpe away from me, ajumma!”

“I’m really not an ajumma!”

Maetel, who had been standing there like a lamb, quickly hid Artpe behind her. Then she bared her teeth towards Mycenae. It made one wonder if she was a dog or some form of an animal in her previous life. Artpe patted Maetel, who was seriously worried.

“Even if I wanted to go, I won’t be able to. Don’t worry about it. Anyways, if you sell that item to anyone, you’ll be unable to handle the aftermath. Be careful.”

The identity of the artifact handed over to Mycenae was a Blood Gold Halberd, which held the curse of madness.

It accelerated the destruction of the user’s mind as a powerful downside, but the weapon would allow one to destroy all enemies and allies alike.

However, Maetel already had control over her Berserk skill, so it was a useless weapon for her. Moreover, the weapon was too heavy for Artpe to wield.

Still, it would be an attractive option to most adventurers or mercenaries. The weapon would lead the user down a path of destruction, yet ambition made people take up such weapons. It was a trait inherent in all humans.

“Hoo hoo. As a merchant, my duty is to sell it at a high price. It is beyond my province to determine, who becomes the owner of an item.”

“You are an unscrupulous trader.”

Artpe let out a bitter laugh as he took out 100 gold from his pouch, and he pushed it

towards Mycenae. She already knew what he would ask for. Mycenae didn't give a reply as she took the money. Then she prepared the potions, water and ration.

In the past year, she had appeared each time they moved onto the next floor. She monopolized the trade with them as they moved from the 6th floor to the 34th floor. This type of trade was almost automatic.

"Excuse me, customer."

She put together items worth 100 gold with no frills. Mycenae asked a question as she divided the items between Artpe and Maetel.

"What is the identity of this Dungeon? Why does it continue to go on like this? Does it perhaps have a tunnel leading to the demon world at the end?"

"We are exploring this place to find that answer."

"You aren't able to come up with a conjecture using your ability?"

Mycenae had a truly surprised expression on her face. Artpe snorted.

"I think you have too high of an opinion in regards to my ability."

"As the number of floor gets deeper, the items that are coming out are increasingly to my liking. From my perspective, I wouldn't mind if the Dungeon goes on for another 100 floors... Still, it is clear that this Dungeon wasn't formed naturally. You probably already guessed this, right?"

"Yes."

Artpe's nodded his head in a self-possessed manner. Then he looked down at the stairway leading to the 35th floor.

Ghouls that were around 2 levels higher than the ones on the 34th floor was probably waiting for them on the next floor. If not, there would be a single jump in difficulty, and new monsters might show up.

"This Dungeon was created by someone with a clear goal in mind. It is true and definite that the two of us aren't challengers that are compatible with that goal."

“Normally, one would usually search the history of the region gain some clues about the Dungeon. If you want such a research done, I can do it for you. I’ll gladly accept a commission to research about the history of this region...”

“I’ll see you later, ajumma.”

“I knew you will answer in such a way.”

Mycenae grumbled as she went away. She notched another loss to him. She accepted the clean loss as she disappeared alongside the light.

However, after he sent her away, her words made him become mired in his thoughts again.

‘The history of this region.....?’

According to his knowledge, this region was where the hero was born. There hadn’t been anything special. It was a place where there was a normal town near the mountain. He knew from his past life that nothing much had occurred here.

On the other hand, how could there be nothing here? Even now, he was in a strange Dungeon that was made by someone.

Maybe, this place was hidden? What if this place was shielded from the eyes of the hero and Demon King?

In the past, the hero hadn’t wanted to desecrate a grave, because she was raised properly by her family. It could have also been the fact that she was quickly sent packing to the royal palace as if she was some fragile glass statue. In the end, she hadn’t discovered this place. Was there some enormous secret hidden here?

‘What happened here in the past? Did something of significance happen here?’

He had no way of finding out. Even if Artpe had the Read All Creation ability, he couldn’t see into the past to a time when he wasn’t alive. It was impossible.

On the other hand, if such a thing was possible.....

“Artpe.....?”

“.....it’s nothing.”

Maetel was looking at his face with a worried look in her eyes. Artpe shook his head to dislodge such thoughts, and he answered her. Unexpectedly, Maetel looked slightly wistful.

“Your face was incredibly serious and dashing.”

“Hmmp. That kind of sweet words will only work against the Four Heavenly Kings of the Demon king’s army.”

This was why such words worked on him. It was a direct hit. Artpe let out a fake cough as he tried to hide the fullness he felt within his heart.

He didn’t know what would appear in front of them. It was something that couldn’t be confirmed unless one saw it with one’s eyes. He also knew that priority of this Dungeon had changed when he found out how the Dungeon was structured.

In other words, they were too far down the road to back off now.

‘In my past life, the hero wasted five years of her life at the castle. We have a lot of time to spare.’

Of course, even if Artpe had used all types of methods to focus on leveling up, it was unclear as to whether he would have been able to achieve a better result than this.

They would have missed out on fighting a horde of Skeletons linked by a rare magic called Record Link. They would have missed out on the precious EXP, and the artifacts they received as reward. They wouldn’t have been amass this much fortune.

The factor that tipped the scale was the fact that Artpe and Maetel was able to develop so many high quality Skills here. It was crazy. If they hadn’t drawn this Dungeon as their first starting place, he wondered if they would have been able to develop skills like Berserk and Mana Link.

Even if they continued to stay inside the Dungeon for five years, it wouldn’t impede with their development.

‘Ah. Of course, I have to get out of here and find those places as soon as possible.....’

Artpe possessed the memories of his past life, so he had several significant advantages he could acquire for himself. He was talking about spell books of great magic, ancient ruins and the like.

While Artpe battled within the Dungeon, he created a hierarchy of which goodies he will go for first. He would gain enough level in the Dungeon where they would be able to travel the world without worry. They will start traveling according to the list he had made.

This was why they didn't have time to hesitate or look back on what had already occurred. It didn't matter what waited for them. They would move forward. This was the will of Maetel and Artpe even if their destination differed!

After they smoothly defeat the Demon King, he would have the means to be able to raise cows in the countryside. At that time, he would be done with Maetel! He didn't care if she wanted to become the queen of a country or a female pope of a religion she built. She was free to do whatever she wanted!

Until that time arrived, Artpe and Maetel had to live a healthy and well-off life. In the immediate future, they would have to pass this Dungeon without any complications.

"Aren't you tired, Maetel? Shall we head down after we sleep?"

"I'm not tired, Artpe. What about you, Artpe? Do you want to use my lap as a pillow?"

"I'm also not tired."

"Tsk."

Maetel grumbled as if she was dissatisfied with his answer. Artpe led Maetel down to the Dungeon's 35th floor.

At that moment, a powerful vibration shook the Dungeon. Accompanying the tremor, a wet and moldy voice could be heard in their ears.

[This test has been maintained for a very long time.]

"That is a pretty ominous introduction!?"

It was as if a legendary figure was about to step forward from the darkness if they took

a step forward. It was a line given by a being, who would drop the adventurers into hell!

“Hey, let’s head back for a moment.”

[Denied.]

When he heard the introductory line emanating from the darkness, Artpe immediately knew something was wrong. He quickly ordered a retreat as soon as they stepped onto this floor. However, the way back to the 34th floor was blocked.

[You bastards are only allowed to go forward.]

“You talk a pretty good game... Ooh?”

Artpe was clicking his tongue as he tried to use his Mana. However, the torches mounted on the wall started to light up in order starting from the nearest torches. The light from the fire revealed the layout of the 35th floor. Artpe groaned when he saw them.

“.....crazy.”

“Look at them, Artpe...”

They were in a really large square, and there were a very, very ,very ,very ,very ,very large number of armored knights filling the place. The armored knights boasted a much more domineering spirit compared to the Ghouls. It was obvious that Undeads were within the armor.

[We’ve been waiting for you, destroyer of rules.]

[Insolent brat. You are the honey tongued brat that defies logic.]

[Your judgement is close at hand.]

Even in death, these beings hadn’t forgotten the will and techniques carved into their bodies. They were knights, who had a sense of self. They were Death Knights. All of them were powerful, and they were all over level 150. There were 500 of them.

If a normal level 120 party was to fight this group, the possibility of them winning was

uncertain.

The one standing in the lead raised its bastard sword towards Artpe as its helmet rattled.

[You have caused dishonor to all of us. You have corrupted the pure hero by spitting on our intent. You have looked down on our power. Your misguided will is now encased in a powerful body, and the worst of the situation has come to pass. You made fool of fate. You connected things that shouldn't be connected, and you severed things you shouldn't have severed.]

All the Death Knights followed the one in the lead as they pointed their swords towards Artpe. During all of this, they hadn't shown much hostility towards Maetel. They directed all their hate towards Artpe as if he was their mortal enemy. It annoyed Artpe.

These bastards were quick in assessing the situation!

[Still, we cannot deny the fact that you are a hero. This is why we will give you this last chance. If you take this last test properly, we will believe in this reality that had be turned on its head. We will trust in the hope blooming from within the darkness that will cause change to the future. We will go back to sleep.]

"No, you don't really have to believe in me."

The ominous feeling was increasing as time passed. Artpe readied the only specialty magic he possessed. He readied himself to use Hyper Rubbing, then he grasped Maetel's shoulder. It was signal for her to get ready for battle. It also told her to be careful of their enemies.

"Don't worry about it, Artpe."

Even in such a situation, Maetel's expression was calm. In the past year, her features had matured considerably. She already looked like an angel, but her beautiful smile made her look like an archangel. She gave a reassurance to Artpe.

"I'll protect Artpe. Artpe will protect me in return?"

".....yes. I trust you."

The shield on Artpe's back rose into the air. He only had to repair the shield couple times as they descended from the 6th floor to the 35th floor. This was why the shield hadn't been replaced with other weapons. It was a rare artifact that gave a weak curse to whatever it hit. If he was with the shield, there was nothing for him to fear!

[When the battle starts, he might use cheap tactics to play us off against each other.]

However, the enemies he would face were excessively resolute in defending against mental warfare.

[This is why we will force the activation of the final test, so you can face it.]

"Uh, hey... Wait a moment, you guys·."

Artpe tried to speak up when he realized what they were about to do, but the Death Knights just glared at Artpe as they plunged their swords into their hearts. Their Mana flooded forth! The restriction of the Record Link made it impossible to attack one's comrades, but it seemed suicide was possible!

As he faced the domineering sight, Artpe yelled out in shock.

"You bastards will be penalized even if you kill yourselves!"

[We are already Undead!]

The 499 Death Knights crumbled in place. The oppressive energy from each of the Death Knights flowed towards the single Death Knight standing in the middle.

It happened when Artpe and Maetel was struck dumb by the ridiculous sight.

[I'm ready, heroes.]

The power of the armored knights were gathered into a single being, and 'It' was reborn as a horrible nightmare. It made a declaration as it pointed its long sword towards the two heroes.

[The test will start.]

Chapter 18

Our Sunbae-nim Did This? (2)

“I’ll use Berserk, Artpe!”

[You don’t have the luxury to chat right now!]

The bastard immediately came at them. The only thing that remained behind the party was the wall blocking the way back up. Consequently, Maetel didn’t hesitate in activating her Berserk skill. She ran forward to face the enemy.

“Tsk. I don’t like the situation dictating our actions.....”

Artpe grumbled as he immediately activated the Mana Link. He connected himself to Maetel. Then he let the shield rotate as a means to protect himself. He was cautious as he descended the stairs. His eyes took in the sight of Maetel and the Death Knight clashing against each other.

[As expected, you are overwhelming more powerful when you use your sword compared to the actual strength you possess. However, you won’t be able to become a hero using a sword steeped in rage!]

“I’m the one swinging this sword, so I don’t care what helps me! I don’t care if it is anger, sadness or happiness. I’ll win against you to protect Artpe! You will never lay a hand on Artpe!”

[If I’m anything like the enemies you faced up until now, you would have been able to accomplish that. However, the experience and power of 500 Death knights were combined to complete me. How dare you speak such arrogant and impudent words towards me!]

The powerful sound of Maetel and the Death Knight exchanging blows with their swords could be heard. Of course, the one taking damage and retreating was Maetel. If she didn’t have the gears protecting her wrists, she would have been severely hurt.

“Koohk...!”

“Tsk. When there were 500 separate monsters, it was a fight with a decent odds. You were cheap in activating the power of Record Link using suicide.....”

[You spout some silly words.]

Maetel already had a cheat-like physical ability compared to her actual level. On top of that, she was able also able to activate the Berserk skill. She could pretty much toy with the level 150 Death Knights at her leisure. However, the enemy she was facing right now was a monster created by combining 500 Death Knights using the Record Link.

Artpe had immediately used his Read All Creation ability to check the monster. The overall difference in ability was devastating. The fact that Maetel was able to instantly regain her stance after weathering through the impact was almost miraculous. She was even charging towards the monster.

[The difference in our power is clear. Oh hero. Will you still get in my way to protect that contemptible boy? Will you do so when the only thing waiting for you is despair and death? Will you sacrifice yourself until the end for a complete stranger?]

“Hoohp.”

Maetel didn't reply to its words. She just charged the monster.

The magical energy within the bastard sword had been well-developed by her. Her powerful swings were knocking back the long sword.

[What the hell!?!]

Surprisingly, she didn't get pushed back this time! When one took in the difference in battle capability, this was a surprising development. Maetel's spirit rose higher as she pushed back against the monster. She yelled out in a fierce manner.

“What happened to the spirit that you displayed before? Wasn't it supposed to be the power of 500 of your kind? It seems you don't have much to show for it right now!”

[Kooh, ha-ah! This was merely a coincidence!]

The armored knight dismissed it as a coincidence, but Artpe immediately knew what had happened through his Read All Creation ability.

While Maetel was using her Swordsmanship, she was using a trick to strengthen her body using Unarmed Combat. It looked as if she was lightly lashing out with her sword, but she was using her Bash skill. This was how she was able to fight on par with the Death Knight.

‘It sounds easy, but she is using two basic battle skill, while using an active skill. When she exchanged blow with the monster, she realized her deficiency, and she patched up the deficiency using the other skills. I thought I had figured her out, but a 13 year old girl has this much of battle capability.....’

Aside from the Mana consumption, the mental and stamina drain should be incredibly high, yet she was doing it all so effortlessly. The sight of her made his blood curdle, and at the same time, it made him admire her.

She was fighting with the armored knight, yet she put on a face as if nothing was wrong. She checked up on Artpe.

“Artpe. Your mana.....”

“I have enough.”

In truth, he didn’t know if he had enough. If she continued to consume magical energy at this pace, even Artpe would run out of Mana.

However, Artpe didn’t want Maetel to look back at him, so he spoke confidently. Of course, he would consume a Mana potion in secret.

“All right.”

Maetel was never suspicious of Artpe. She always trusted him, so a grin appeared on her face when she heard his words. She once again surged forward against her enemy using the Bash skill.

“Then I’ll be able to win. Haahhhhhp!”

Once again, Maetel and the Death Knight exchanged blows. Maetel was able to perfectly execute the Bash skill using her sword, and she struck the same location on the long sword she had hit before. However, the Death Knight quickly wised up to her tactic. The armored knight let out a shout as it twisted its sword. The impact point on the sword was changed.

[You are pretty clever. I thought the only thing within your head was love, lust and anger.]

“That’s right. I only have that... However, that will be enough for me!”

[How laughable!]

Even if its power and experience was all gathered into a single being, it still possessed equipment that was only around level 150. It was an excellent battle plan to attack the weapon rather than the monster itself.

No one had taught her this tactic, yet she was carrying it out. It was unknown as to whether she understood what she was doing.

[Your intentions are commendable, but will it really be enough? Even now I can feel your anger deepen. Your rationality is fading, and it is being encroached by your instincts. It blunts your sword. Just this fact allows me to get slowly stronger. I just have to wait for the moment when my sword will be able to pierce through your heart.]

“There is no way I’ll let you do as you please.”

Maetel’s clash with the Death Knight was gradually intensifying. Maetel’s swordsmanship had been trained through live battles, and she only attacked the Death Knight’s weak points. The Death Knight used all its veteran know-how to turn away all her sword strikes.

Both their attacks failed to touch each other’s defensive gear. The weapons were taking the brunt of the damage.

[Koohk, koo-hah.....! You don’t stand a chance!]

“That is my line!”

The Death Knight innocently believed that Maetel had reached the pinnacle of her skills. However, only Artpe knew the truth.

The answer was simple. Maetel was improving even now. The effects of the Berserk skill didn’t dull her sword. Instead, her senses had sharpened to the extreme.

[Weak! It’ll be impossible for you if you keep this up!]

“Yes, I am weak... However, I’ll become stronger.....!”

[If someone could get stronger just by saying so, this world wouldn’t have practitioners!]

Sword clashed against sword. The Death Knight’s shield was swung towards Maetel’s head, yet it passed through the air in vain.

Afterwards, Maetel kicked the bastard in its knee, and the Death Knight’s stance was thrown off by a marginal amount. She immediately followed it up with a sword strike. This was a technique she hadn’t shown up until now.

[Ha!]

“Koo-oohk!”

It was as the Death Knight had said before, she never had the chance to swing her weapon against an enemy that was on par with her. However, for the first time, she faced an enemy that seemed to be a knight, and she had no choice but to fight it using high grade weapon skills.

By chance, this opportunity gave her a chance to consolidate all her techniques.

In the past, she had been swinging her sword by following her instinct, but now she had seen how others handled their swords. She now knew how she had to move her body. Her body figured out how maximize the power of her sword. Basically, the Death Knight had become her tutor for a day.

[Maetel]

[Level - 124]

[Swordsmanship Lv19]

[Unarmed Combat Lv16]

In real time, her Unarmed Combat skill and Swordsmanship skill was rising. Her simple and brutal sword strikes were now showing variations and subtlety. There was a different level of power within her when she took a step forward or backwards.

The strikes she hadn’t been able to withstand before was being blocked with impunity.

In the beginning, the Death Knight had known where the sword strikes would be coming from, but she struck at its long sword before the Death Knight realized it was coming. At that moment, the Death Knight couldn't help, but come to a realization.

[You bitch... How.....!?!]

“Do you have nothing else you can show me?..... If so, you can't win against me.”

[How... What the hell is this?]

There was a difference between knowing an answer, and the answer being etched into your body. However, the two things were basically interchangeable for Maetel.

It was fucked up. She was such a ridiculous genius that such a messed up thing was possible.

[You are truly a marvel. When you first came into the Dungeon, I couldn't believe how inexperienced you were. What caused you to be like this? You are with such an underhanded person. How can your pure mind not deteriorate by being associated with him?]

“Hoo-ahhhhhhhhp!”

[Haht!]

Maetel didn't give a reply as she used her Bash skill. Of course, her Bash skill had been evolving during the battle. The Death Knight had to exert much more power to block her strikes. However, the Death Knight still had some room to breathe.

[Even if you are able to grow quickly, there must be a wall you cannot jump over! In the end, you will fall to your knees and die. Do you realize the difference in the quantity of Mana we possess? Let's see how long you can keep swinging your sword with such force.]

“I won't..... I will protect Artpe!”

[You are putting your life on the line for a worthless human! Is your life worth so little, hero? You shouldn't be sacrificing yourself for a man like him! You have to sacrifice yourself for humanity!]

“I’ll choose who I’ll protect! I don’t care about the people I have yet to meet! The most precious person to me is Artpe!”

If someone else saw this sight, one would think this was the scene before the climax where each side argued their side was righteous. In truth, this was only a boss battle within a beginner’s Dungeon. Artpe was a bit baffled as he watched the fierce fight from the back.

“That bastard is treating me as if I’m the Demon King...”

When Artpe’s party entered the 35th floor, he remembered that the rage of all the Death Knights had been focused on him.

Currently, the Death Knight was stuck facing Maetel, because Artpe’s defense was absolute. If Artpe gave it a sliver of opportunity, the Death Knight would immediately try to behead Artpe.

If Artpe was killed, the Mana Link between the two of them would be dismissed. In turn, Maetel wouldn’t be able to maintain her Berserk skill. He was using a valid tactic.

‘I’m unable to step forward into the battle. I have to wait knowing my fate is uncertain. This situation is so befitting the weakest amongst the Four Heavenly Kings that I have no words to say in rebuttal.’

If his life wasn’t on the line, he wouldn’t have cared if he was the main character or an extra. However, his head would be severed from his body when the hero gets slightly tired. It was a pathetic situation to be in.

‘Still, I’m no longer the weakest amongst the Four Heavenly King.’

Artpe let out a bitter laugh as he raised his shield.

It seemed the bastard was too shocked by Maetel’s talent that it was under a misconception. Maetel did have incredible talent, which could astound anyone. However, the person responsible for complicating the situation was Artpe. He had a rotten smile on his face.

The Death Knight probably thought Artpe would put down his guard if it focused on Maetel. Of course, that wouldn’t happen. Artpe was acting as if he was spinning his shield, but he had already emitted several hundred to several thousand Mana Threads.

In the process, he had already consumed five bottles of Mana potion. He only had a single Mana Potion left.

‘The Record Link is still covering the entirety of the Dungeon.’

To be precise, it covered the Dungeon from the 6th floor to the 35th floor. If Artpe hadn’t tinkered with it, they would have had to fight all the monsters on the 6th floor. They would have died.

Anyways, Artpe had messed with the Record Link placed over the Dungeon, and he had divided the Dungeon back into multiple floors. This meant the newly born monsters past the 6th floor had no idea what was going on. They would only be linked to the monsters on the same floor, and they had to wait until the challengers arrived. This would remain so until he canceled what he did to the Record Link.

So what if...

“What would happen if I undid the restriction placed on the Record Link? Have you thought about it?”

Artpe intentionally spoke those words aloud. He did it to create an opening.

[What.....?]

“Hoohp!”

His plan was very effective. For a brief moment, it stopped swinging its sword. As if she had been waiting for this moment, Maetel kicked off the ground as she leapt towards the Death Knight. She stabbed towards its sword. A clear sound rang out, and the Death Knight’s sword broke in the middle.

[Koohk!]

The Death Knight finally regained its senses. It took a half step backwards to regain its stance. It pushed its shield slightly forward, and it unsheathed a secondary weapon. It gripped the long dagger as it glared at Maetel and Artpe.

[What do you think you can accomplish by breaking my sword, hero? I’ve already discerned the fact that you are consuming Mana at an alarming rate. Also, do you think you can shake me with such words, boy with the rotten eyes? There is no way you’ll

do something that would only be beneficial to us.]

“No, you aren’t entirely correct.”

Record Link was a skill that brought together the record of everything tied together by the magic. It gathered battle experience, skill, magical energy and stamina in one place.

However, Record Link possessed a really big weakness. There were multiple reason why this magic spell was banned. However, this particular weakness was the most fatal and annoying reason of them all.

“Why do you think I’ve raised this shield up until now? If you think hard on it, you might figure it out...”

Maetel was breathing roughly as she stoked the rage from within as she fought the Death Knight. The Death Knight had no choice, but to retreat. It tried to keep calm as it looked for a chance to counterattack. Artpe grinned as he looked at the Death Knight.

“Ha! Maetel, you should look out for the falling monsters and the upheaval of your surrounding!”

He had extended several thousand Mana Threads to its limits. He had tied off parts of the Record Link to cause change to it. He had done this only a year ago.

Now he unravelled all the changes he had caused!

“Kyahhhhhhhhk!”

[Did you really.....!]

The Dungeon shook. The Dungeon, which had been separated into floors, was being combined into a single floor in short order! The Record Link, which had been tied off into small pieces, was whole again. It once again surrounded the entirety of the Dungeon.

The ceilings that separated the 6th floor to the 35th floor melted away in an instant. Skeletons and Ghouls that had reformed in the past year were once again tied to the Record Link. Now they were falling from above. It was a sight that had a strong resemblance to hell!

[Are you perhaps trying to create an opening by creating a mess!? It was in vain. What you did right now is called an idiotic mistake...]

“It was impossible to do this one year ago, because my stamina and magical energy was lacking. It was impossible even half a year ago!”

Artpe threw his shield into the air. His shield throw technique had matured in the past year. He was able to throw it fast and high. He quickly and ruthlessly killed all the falling Zombies and Ghouls.

“However, it is possible now. I was pretty meticulous in preparing for this!”

The Record Link regained its full power. This meant all the record of the dead monsters would be shared with the Death Knight.

Their power, intellect, stamina, magical energy, record, and.....

[Koohk. You bastard.....!?!]

“You’ll gain all the curses I placed on all of them.”

The curse was stacking as he killed all the monsters. In a flash, the Death Knight’s movements slowed. He had a twisted smile on his face as he watched the shocked Death Knight.

It was an evil smile that was well-matched with the Demon King.

Chapter 19

Our Sunbae-nim Did This? (3)

[This is ridiculous. There is no way the curses placed on the dead will be transferred...]

“Yes, they no longer exist, but they haven’t died yet. You carry them on your back! They are placed inside your chest! Each one of them continue to live on as part of you. Isn’t that right?”

In a flash, Artpe was able to apply several dozen Slowdown curse on the Death Knight. It creaked as it moved. It was as if the Death Knight was wearing a rusted armor. Artpe taunted it.

[Koo-hook.....!]

However, it had no way of counteracting the effect. This effect was what made the Record Link such a dangerous magic! It prevented the death of beings that should be dead, and all their power was transferred. Basically, they could live on within another entity!

“This is why even the weakest curse will be transferred to you. If I want to have numerous curses placed on you... I just have to kill them all.”

Artpe forcefully swung his hand as the shield flew through the air. The shield moved based on his will. Even now, the shield was slicing through the falling Zombies and Ghouls.

Its bears repeating that the curse contained within the shield was weak. It was able to attach a weak slowdown effect on its target, but the effect could be stacked.

As each Undead fell from the sky, Artpe cut them into pieces with his shield. It felt as if shackles were being placed all over the Death Knight’s body every time an Undead was killed.

[Kooo-ahhhhhhhhhh!]

“Of course, the one left behind will be the one to suffer. This is the biggest reason why the Record Link was banned. If you didn't know that, you should study up on it. Well, it is too late for you to do so.”

Artpe laughed uproariously. The Death Knight had tried to attack him, yet his efforts were in vain, since Maetel had been able to hold it back. It had been a long long time, since he had felt this much mirth.

“It is rare to find a curse that can stack infinitely. Why do you think I haven't scrapped this lousy shield? Why do you think I was frugal in its use?”

[Nooo wayyyy. Noooooooooooooo waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay. Youuuuuuuuuuuu Baaaaaaaaaaa-ssssssssssssss-taaaaaaaaaaaard.]

“Yes.”

The power of the slowdown curse within the shield had a widespread effect of causing minuscule slowdown on the target's intelligence, stamina, Mana and skills. The Death Knight was feeling the cumulative effect of over hundred of these curses. The speed of Death Knight's thought process and the ability to speak had slowed down to a ridiculous degree.

“Yes. I, Artpe-nim, prepared for the boss battle from the beginning. I readied all of this for this day when I would dispel the restriction I placed on the Record Link!”

Artpe sneered at the Death Knight, and he took the coolest pose he could come up with for maximum effect. He used to be one of the Four Heavenly King of the Demon King's army. He was a being that acted as if his arrogance had no bounds! He bragged whenever he gained a sliver of advantage over his enemies! He did this in the most spiteful and shameless manner!

“Artpe is too cool!”

[Kooooooooooh-ahhh!]

While Artpe was busy posing, the shield tirelessly cut through the body of the falling Zombies and Ghouls.

He had sharpened the edges of the shield in anticipation for this day. There was no way its edges would dull right now. The number of monsters killed went from several

dozen to several hundred then to several thousand.

[Ggoo-ooooooooh, ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooh.]

At this point in time, the Death Knight had for all intents and purposes become worse than a level 3 Goblin. The Undead, who tried to test the heroes, had run out of all its opportunities.

It hadn't even been able to put up a good fight. It hadn't been able to use its secret technique. It had been unable to give its cool final line nor was it able to lecture the heroes. It had pathetically frozen in place before it was able to punish Artpe.

“Eh-eet.”

Meanwhile, Maetel was being sensible by distancing herself from the Death Knight. If she killed the Death Knight right now, its power would be transferred into the Zombies and Ghouls. They would harden to a point where they wouldn't be able to handle them. She had arrived at a very logical conclusion.

“No, Maetel!”

Maetel was patting herself on the back when Artpe gave her instructions to the contrary.

“If that bastard kills itself in a suicide, our reward will become infinitely worse! We don’t want to receive dropped items from really high level Zombies or Ghouls! We want the dropped items of a Death Knight created from gathering all the energy through Record Link! You have to prevent it from killing itself!”

"Ah, all right! As expected, Artpe is smart!"

Who in the world would call these wicked people as being heroes! They were superbly rotten to the core that even the Demon King would come study under their tutelage!

The Death Knight watched Maetel break through the flood of monsters falling from the sky, and she immediately disarmed it. It was vexed that it couldn't move to stop her, but Artpe had killed an excessive amount of cursed monsters. It was hard for the Death Knight to even lift a single finger.

[Cheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeaaaaaaaaaaaaappppppppppppppppppppppppppppp.....]

“Ah. It is game over for it since the curse has stacked this much. Maetel, you should now help me kill the others.”

“Yes!”

They had descended this Dungeon for the past year, so they were well versed in what to do now. There were a lot of monsters tied to the Record Link right now. It was as if someone had barfed them all up. It was a good thing Artpe and Maetel had faced all of them before while they came down here. If not, they wouldn't have stood a chance.

“Eh-eet, eh-eet.”

[Oooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhng.]

[Geeeeeeeeeeeeee, ggeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.]

The Death Knight didn't tie himself to so many beings so that it would die after twitching slowly across the ground like a cicada larva. Of course, Artpe and Maetel didn't care about that!

Maetel had made sure to cripple the Death Knight so it couldn't kill itself. Then she put away her sword as she beat the nearby monsters to death using a bone club.

Artpe hummed as he controlled the shield. By the time he killed all of them, the shield would become unusable. However, this shield was only useful for this Dungeon. He didn't care what happened to it after this.

“You are really a genius, Artpe.”

“Yes, I do think I'm somewhat of a genius. Maetel is also quite the genius.”

“Thank you! I think I fought fairly well even if I say so myself!”

The two heroes kept praising each other as they cleared the Dungeon in a friendly manner. The Death Knight was rolling around on the floor like a larvae, so what could mere Zombies and Ghouls do against them! It was as if they were hit by lightning!

The lucky ones died immediately after they hit the floor. The unlucky ones already had the misfortune of being Undead, yet they were in a situation where they couldn't even move properly. They were only able to blink their eyes until it was their turn to die.

[Goo-oooh.]

It was unknown as to who had created this Dungeon, but at the very least, the creator of this Dungeon probably didn't place the Record Link expecting to see such a sight! This wasn't a Dungeon that was meant to grow candidates for becoming the Demon King! This was a place built to develop heroes! It was the builder's mistake in assuming that all heroes were goody two shoes pushovers.

'Ah. Ahhhhhhhhh.....'

The Death Knight had lost both its arms, and it had been completely disarmed. As it rolled around the floor, the Death Knight watched the two evil heroes clear the Zombies and Ghouls.

Every time one of the Undead died, a minuscule amount of power was coming in towards the Death Knight. Most of them were cursed, so it was a scary proposition where the slowdown effect was much higher than the strengthening effect. It had lost the power to move around a long time ago, and now it was having a hard time thinking.

The Death Knight lamented over its misfortune. It had failed to read Artpe's outrageous abilities, so it mocked itself on its own ignorance. It moaned at the sight of the broken Dungeon. The Death Knight wondered if it could really entrust it all to them.....

It decided not to think about it anymore.

Four days passed. It took a long time even though the two were killing defenseless monsters.

From the midpoint on, the records of monsters had started to overlap too much. From that point on, the constitution of the remaining Undead became unnecessarily high. This was why it was taking so long. The only danger that posed a threat to the two heroes was them becoming too tired, and falling asleep in front of the monsters.

"Did we really kill all of them?"

"Yes, we killed every single one of them. We even killed the ones stuck up there."

"Yes, I also confirmed it."

This Dungeon was ridiculously large and deep. It took him around 30 minutes to sweep the place for monsters that were still alive with his Read All Creation ability.

However, it was all over now. There was only one monster left in the entire Dungeon. It was the Death Knight that was only capable of rolling around on the floor.

“Hmmm.”

Artpe wanted to ask if it wanted have its last words, but there was no response from the Death Knight even after Artpe pounded on it. It was acting like a normal corpse.

“Artpe, you have to kill it. Currently, my level is too high compared to yours. We have to balance it out.”

“I knew you would say that.”

Artpe raised his shield. He had killed numerous monsters with it so it was damaged and deformed. It was hard to call it a shield now. It was basically a lump of metal.

He wondered if the Death Knight would be satisfied with being killed by a lump of metal, which was neither a weapon nor a defensive gear. Of course, it was no concern of his.

“Koohk. Eh-eet. Crap. It is so damn hard.”

Artpe diligently pounded the Death Knight with the lump of metal. However, the Death Knight had absorbed all the records to reach its final form, so it wouldn't die from an attack of that caliber. Artpe had no choice, but to forcefully push his Mana into the lump of metal.

“If you don't die from this, I'll call you my teacher!”

He placed the lump of metal beneath the Death Knight's body, and he immediately used the Hyper Rubbing spell. The lump of metal rubbed against the Death Knight with a ludicrous amount of force!

It couldn't be helped. The surface of the Death Knight's body touching the lump of metal was starting to fracture a little bit. It was a brutal sight! It made one wonder if this was some new form of torture!

[Go-oooooooooooooooooh.]

It seemed the Death Knight wanted to say something, but its reaction had slowed down too much. One couldn't tell what it was trying to say. Artpe wanted to end its misery, so he increased his Mana output. The rubbing became more fierce, and it was accompanied by a change.

"Ah. The lump of metal is becoming red-hot!"

"It's a Mana reaction. That lump of metal used to be an Artifact. The Mana infused within it will become agitated by the Mana I injected. It'll cause an explosion. The explosion caused by detonating an Artifact is much stronger than detonating a simple rock. You should keep that in mind."

"Then why did you activate the Hyper Rubbing?"

"I just wanted to tease that bastard... Duck!"

At that moment, the lump of metal exploded! The Death Knight received the entirety of the incredible force generated by the explosion. As a result, it was able to find its eternal rest. It probably would have been much happier by the fact that it was taken out this way.

"Koo-oooooooooooooooooh."

"Koohp."

This was obvious, but an incredible amount of EXP entered into Artpe and Maetel when the Death Knight was killed. The primary form of the completed Death Knight had been incredible already, but the Dungeon had been restored to its original form. All the record of the monsters were gathered into a single being! This result was to be expected.

"Artpe. It feels as if my head is going to split open-ahhhhh."

"Don't worry. I feel the same way... Koo-heck."

Even in his previous life, he had never experience such successive level ups. Mana filled up within his body as it kept evolving. It put a great amount of stress on his mind.

“Ughhh, Artpe.”

Artpe was trying to hold back the urge to lose consciousness when he heard Maetel calling for him. He raised his head to respond to her when he realized why she had called out to him.

“Wow. This is nuts.”

“Ggoo-ooooooooooh.”

Maybe, the killing of all the Monsters connected to the Record link was the impetus. The Dungeon was once again going through a change!

If more monsters came out once again, it would have been really annoying. Fortunately, this wasn't the case. The Dungeon was quickly losing its size. The square was also getting smaller, and the material making up the Dungeon was changing.

“This is as if..... Ah.”

The cherry on top was the fountain that appeared in the middle of the square. Maetel's body and mind was tired, so she was about to let out a shout of joy. As she was about to run towards the clear water, she paused to look back at Artpe.

“That's poisoned water, right! Aren't I right, Artpe!”

She thought she had shown sound judgment by stopping, so Maetel let out a fake cough.

He put on a bright smile as he faced her. He spoke to her...

“Nope, that is just regular water.”

Chapter 20

Our Sunbae-nim Did This? (4)

“As expected, you finished this floor in couple days. The Anywhere company always... Huh?”

Mycenae made her entrance as she gave a lively greeting. However, her eyes turned round when she realized the Dungeon looked entirely different from before. There were no stairways leading up or down. There was only a square, and the Dungeon’s ceiling, which was slowly descending. And.....

She saw the two brats taking a shower inside the fountain placed in the middle of the square.

“.....did a curse perhaps lower your mental capacity?”

She wondered if they had lost their minds. She wanted to ask the question in the most tactful manner she could manage. Of course, it was worthless bringing it up with Artpe. He let out a snort as he looked over Mycenae with scorn in his eyes.

“W... what is it, customer?”

“Huh? Kyahhhhhhhk!”

“I want soap and clean underwear. I want it for Maetel and I.”

When Mycenae appeared, Maetel screamed as she hunched to hide her body. Artpe remained unbowed. He was confident as he threw the silver coin towards Mycenae. He gave a list of what he needed.

Since they hadn’t been able to get out of the Dungeon for the past year, Mycenae understood why Artpe and Maetel were familiar with each other’s nude form. However, she never expected him to be so bold in front of her! Mycenae’s face slightly reddened.

“You are a really rude customer. One silver won’t cover it!”

“Yes, that is why I’ll give you a second one.”

“Wait a moment, customer.”

Artpe used a very weak form of Hyper Rubbing. It was on the level of Soft Rubbing where it merely felt as if the spell was scrubbing him. He applied soap, and it automatically scrubbed his body. When Maetel saw this, she pestered him until he used the spell on her.

“Tsk. It can't be helped. Here.”

“Ah-hee. This is ticklish. Hee-hee-hee-heek.”

“There really is nothing you cannot do with magic.....”

For a moment, Mycenae thought about heading back, but the sight of the broken body of the Death Knight weighed heavily on her mind.

Even if it had met its death, Mycenae could get a rough idea of its record, and Mana that had remained behind in the corpse. The Death Knight had the potential of being a big jackpot compared to any other monsters within this Dungeon.

Moreover, if there were no stairway leading downwards, it meant that they had reached the end of the Dungeon. In other words, this monster was the boss of the entire Dungeon. It was the Dungeon Boss!

“Are you going to sell something to me?”

“Wait until we clean ourselves.”

“I think the fountain will become polluted before you can clean yourself, customer.”

In truth, they hadn’t been able to properly wash their bodies for past year. Thankfully, the buildup of grime on their bodies were swept away every time they leveled up. They had survived relying on this mechanism.

Artpe and Maetel were thorough in washing their body. It took them exactly two hours to complete the task. It felt as if they were reborn. They even used the soap to wash their equipments made out of cloth. They washed it with a vengeance as bubbles formed. Artpe wore the underwear handed to him by Mycenae, and he dried his robe

with Mana before putting it on. Then he sat down on the floor.

“Hoo. I finally feel like I'm human again.”

“Now that you’ve washed yourself, you look a bit... No, you are very handsome. If you grow a little bit more, you are going make many women cry.”

Artpe snorted as he dismissed Mycenae’s words. He checked on how Maetel was doing. As expected, she had already put on all her clothes. She was growling as she glared at Mycenae.

Did she think Mycenae was targeting Artpe? Maetel always acted daft. Artpe let out a sigh, and he lightly flicked her forehead.

“Let’s loot.”

“Yes!”

The gazes of Artpe, Maetel and Mycenae headed towards the corpse of the Death Knight. Artpe didn’t hesitate as he shot his Mana towards the corpse.

A bright light rose into the air, and as the light dimmed, three Artifacts revealed themselves. When Maetel saw one of them, she let out a shout with a bright light in her eyes.

“It’s a long sword!”

“It’s yours.”

“Yay!”

The long sword looked similar to the one used by the Death Knight. However, this one looked sharper and more durable. It even had the ability to spike the user’s Mana in an instant to shoot it towards a single location. It was an unbelievably great Artifact. It strengthened Maetel’s weakness of not having a long range attack.

The only downside was the fact that the level needed to equip it was quite high. One needed to be level 150.....

[Maetel]

[Level : 154]

“Excellent, Maetel. I have no more words to describe your cheat-like status.”

“Ee-hee-hee. If you praise me so much, I’ll be embarrassed.”

“It wasn’t a compliment.”

Artpe looked at his own reflection on the surface of the water. He checked his own level.

He was level 145. He had almost achieved a miracle by raising his level to 145, but he was clearly inferior to Maetel, who had climbed over the level 150 mark. He didn’t compare favorably to her.

He thought this from the beginning, but he didn't see how it was possible for the Demon King to take over this world. The probability was less than 50%. In his past life, what were they thinking holding such a shining beacon of talent within the palace?

“Customer. The helmet...”

“I knew ajumma would covet it.”

On the other side, Mycenae’s eyes were fixed on a helmet that looked similar to what the Death Knight had been wearing. It looked incredibly sturdy, and it was an Artifact that was very well suited to carry out its original goal of protecting the user.

Yes, if he was being honest, the helmet was a much better Artifact than the long sword. However.....

[Revengeful Death Knight’s Helm]

[The curse will turn the wearer into a high rank Death Knight. When one equips the helm, all emotions and thought process will be amplified. The wearer’s Mana, skills and spells will be changed into having Darkness attribute, and it will be amplified. The wearer will grow by sucking in the energy of death.]

This was the quintessential cursed item. It was a ridiculous cursed item that could bring down an entire city if one wasn’t careful. Artpe was aghast as he turned to look

at Mycenae. He asked her a question.

“Do you really want to buy this, ajumma?”

“We, in the Anywhere company, firmly believe that items aren’t capable of possessing sin. That is the purview of people.”

Mycenae’s eyes refused to leave the helm. She knew it was a cursed item, yet she was sure it was an item that could bring her profit. Her eyes were the eyes of a merchant.

Of course, Artpe knew about the greed that one felt for good items and wealth. It was what made a merchant a merchant... Still, he had seen the world through his Read All Creation ability in his past life. The world always flowed with blood, because of treasures.

He had always been surrounded by sea of blood thanks to his ability. This was why treasures didn’t hold much appeal to him.

“There might come a day when you will regret this.”

“Do not worry about me, customer. I might not look it, but I’ve lived a very long time.”

Yes, it seemed his words weren’t registering with her, because he was young. She was the sort of person that won’t come to a realization until she experienced a big ordeal.

Artpe shrugged his shoulders as he handed her the helm. Mycenae put on a welcoming smile as she took the...

“780 gold.”

“Eek!”

“I know you’ll be selling it for over 1,000 gold. Don't make a big fuss about this. Just give me the money.”

“You are young, and you’ve been stuck in this Dungeon for a year. So how are you so knowledgeable about the market prices!?”

In the end, she took the helm from him. Her hands shook as she handed over the pouch containing the gold.

“A large dimensional magic spell was placed on this pouch. The price of this pouch is 50 gold, so I’ve place 730 gold within. You probably don’t want to carry around the entirety of the 780 gold. Please do me a favor by taking this deal!”

“All right. I’ll overlook it.”

It was a plain looking leather pouch, yet it was worth 50 gold! Maetel’s eyes spun, but Artpe didn’t show any surprise. He took the pouch.

In truth, he possessed another dimensional pouch. There was around 400 gold within that pouch. Their party now possessed money approaching 1,200 gold.

“So, there is only one thing left. Isn’t this just an egg?”

“Ajumma. Does this really look like a normal egg?”

The long sword and the helm were artifacts that was well-matched with the Death Knight. However, everyone had a hard time accepting that the last item was dropped by a Death Knight.

It was an egg that was small, black, and oval-shaped. When one touched it, one could feel the pulse of life from within it. Maetel’s mouth salivated as she looked down at it.

“Do you think this will be tasty, Artpe?”

“I want you to think of it as something given birth by the Death Knight. Do you want to eat it when you know that fact?”

“I’m hungry!”

Did she really want to eat it? Artpe let out a sigh as he flicked Maetel on her forehead. Then he put away the egg.

“It is a Chaos Egg born artificially by the Record Link. It is ridiculous to think that death was able to give life, but... Since the Record Link had rarely been used throughout history, it is tough to come to a definite conclusion.”

It would be funny if a Death Knight popped out from the Chaos Egg. However, he didn’t that would be the case.

He had thoroughly checked it with his Read All Creation ability, but the only information he could glean was its name. Basically, he won't know what will be born until the Chaos Egg hatches.

"What will be born from it? If Artpe and my love can....."

"I don't know what you are thinking about, but that won't happen."

"Heeng. Artpe, stop being mean to me."

He had no idea how he should incubate it. Artpe decided to put it within the inner pocket of his robe. If it broke, that was its fate. At that point, he'll just make scrambled eggs with it!

All the items left behind by the Death Knight was collected. Their levels had increased, and their skills had developed. Now they equipped their equipment over their clean bodies. Artpe felt refreshed as he waved his hand towards Mycenae. He was saying goodbye to her.

"You can go now, ajumma. You bought everything you wanted."

"Why would I go? The most important Dungeon reward is still to come."

Mycenae kept staring at the fountain placed in the middle of the square.

Artpe and Maetel had wasted a lot of water by washing themselves in it, but the fountain kept pumping out clear water from some unknown place. It looked as if Mycenae believed that there was a secret kept within it.

"I won't give that up."

"As always, I just want to purchase items at a fair price....."

"Ajumma."

Artpe smiled sweetly. Mycenae had remarked on this fact before, but his charming smile wasn't something that should exist on the face of a thirteen year old.

"I'll see you again next time."

“Heht.....”

For a brief moment, she had been mesmerized by his smile. However, she recovered her wits when she heard the cold voice that slipped out of Artpe’s mouth.

Her cheeks puffed out, and she banged on her blameless cart. She shouted towards him.

“Ha. I really can’t win against you. All right. I just have to leave, right? Please look kindly on the Anywhere company in the future! Tsk!”

Mycenae disappeared from where she had been standing. Maetel grumbled as she stared at the spot where Mycenae had disappeared.

“I don’t like that ajumma.”

“That ajumma is neither good or bad. She is only a merchant, who puts profit above all else. We were able purchase supply without much fuss thanks to the ajumma. Moreover, we were able to get decent price for the items we sold.”

Actually, he had received a very generous amount, but Artpe didn’t want to get into that topic here. He slowly walked towards the fountain.

Yes, Mycenae's hunch had been spot on. It was likely that everything left within the Dungeon was gathered at the fountain. This was probably the true reward given to the hero, who overcame all the tests.

They had used a rotten method to pass the test, but they had passed it. It was time for them to see the fruit of their ordeal, which had lasted for a year.

“The fountain was put there to fool us. The entrance is below it. The reward is also placed underneath it.”

“There is something below? Shouldn’t there only be the ground below?”

“Where do you think the water is coming from?”

Artpe smirked as he gave instructions to Maetel.

“Let’s destroy the fountain.”

“Yes!”

Maetel was confident only when it came to destroying stuff. She gave an energetic reply as she raised her newly acquired long sword. She focused her Mana within it.

Her level was above 150, so she possessed a sufficient pool of Mana within her. She didn't need to be linked with Artpe.

“Wow. I can feel my Mana gathering at the tip of my sword.”

“Ready, aim..... Fire!”

“Eh-eet!”

The long sword was black, but when she gathered her Mana into the sword, it let out a bright golden light. It was the same color as Maetel's hair.

The energy shot out from the tip of the sword, and it flew in a straight line towards the fountain. The energy impacted on the fountain, and it was destroyed easily. A hidden hallway was revealed.

They hadn't expected another underground space, but it was a large space where people could reside. The clear underground water encompassed and flowed around the space. A clean and refined stone surface covered the hallway.

There was a single altar placed in the middle.

“.....Artpe, what is that?”

Maetel found two books placed on something that looked to be an altar.

One book had a red leather cover, and the other one had a blue leather cover. Of course, Artpe immediately knew the identity of the books when he saw them.

“Those are Skill Books..... Ha.”

It wasn't just normal Skill Books. These were Unique Skill Books that could be learned only by 'Heroes'.

When he realized the implications of this, Artpe felt electrified. He had kept his

expectations in check, but this Dungeon had really been made for a hero. At that moment, what he thought was a coincidence turned into destiny!

Chapter 21

Our Sunbae-nim Did This? (5)

From time immemorial, the red color signified a warrior, and the blue color signified a magician. Of course, the population of magicians was very small compared to the warriors. This was why it was clear, who this was prepared for.

“Normally, Heroes are are able to learn both. They possess the power of a warrior and the power of a magician.”

“But I can’t use magic!”

“I already know that fact, so you don’t have to repeat it.”

During their spare time, he had tried to teach her the basics of magic. However, all his attempts had failed.

She was dumb. She was so obviously dumb that no one would be able to say otherwise. If one gave her a sword, she was a genius, who could easily take down monsters that were much higher in level than her. At the same time, she was an idiot, who couldn’t figure out a simple math problem. It was said that the heavens was fair in its dealings. This truth was never felt so keenly as when he looked at Maetel.

“That is why you have to learn how to do magic.”

“We can split them between us in a friendly way!”

Maetel let out a pure laugh. This really wasn’t something that should be laughed at. Artpe kept sighing as they ran down towards the plaza that existed below the fountain.

When they touched the floor, the entrance made by Maetel closed as a ceiling slid into place.

“Would you look at this.....?”

This felt weird. Artpe narrowed his eyes as he looked at his surrounding. Fortunately,

they were in a large space. A waterway had been created, so there was a constant stream of fresh water available. It was so clear that they would be able to drink it straight out of the waterway. They also wouldn't have to worry about running out of air.

However, there were no exits here.

"Basically, the Dungeon hasn't ended yet...?"

Now that he thought about it, he had killed the Death Knight, who had been the last monster connected to the Record Link. They had received EXP from it, yet the energy of the Record Link still remained in this place. He was sure there weren't any monsters left. However, it seemed a test remained. Maybe, the act of learning the Skills was a form of test.

"There is something written here, Artpe."

Maetel had walked towards the altar before Artpe, and she was pointing at a section of the altar.

"Huh. You are right."

Artpe headed towards the altar, and he could see hard characters carved into it. If he was to be precise, this was the language of the Ancient Empire. No one in this world would have an easy time reading it. However, Artpe was an exception since he possessed the Read All Creation ability.

"I congratulate you for overcoming the trials, beginner hero. Anyone who was able to find this place would know about me, so I won't talk about myself'..... Even this introduction is all wrong."

"He must have been a really famous person."

"Fame erodes away over time. He was foolish for not knowing this."

Artpe read those arrogant words. He sneered at the desire for fame that was unique to humans. Maetel didn't know about his slimy inner thoughts, so she continued to laugh, while saying Artpe was smart.

Of course, Artpe didn't care about learning about the name of the hero. He had a

general idea as to who it was. The man boldly wrote about beginner heroes. He was probably a former hero from a generation or several generations ago.

Artpe didn't know who the previous generation's hero was. He didn't even know the name of the previous generation's Demon King. He just knew that the language of the Ancient Empire was being used here, so at the very least, this Dungeon was several hundred years old.

"I had faith that a hero would one day be born again in this land. I also believed that this hero would come looking for my tomb. However, I cannot give you the secrets of the hero just because you are a junior, who respects your sunbae. This is why I put forth the Record Link to test you. Please forgive me."

"It seems this person was born around here too."

"Yes and he was spectacularly forgotten by everyone."

By its outside appearance, how could this be the grave of a previous hero? No one in his past life knew about this truth! At this point, it was a wonder as to how the information became so perfectly hidden!

Still, it was believable when he thought more on it. There was a high probability that Maetel was a descendant of this previous hero. It was normal for the family of heroes to have one or two secrets.

"I believe any hero that was able to safely reach this point will be able to complete the next task. I trust you, and I will not be suspicious of you. I have placed these presents here for my junior. All you have experienced to reach this point were lessons. I placed a mixture of skill and spell that is tied to the Record Link. You should learn it before you leave."

The words ended there. Artpe was surprised by this fact. He thought the man would continue to boast by writing around 10,000 words, but he had ended it more cleanly than Artpe had expected.

"Well, let me see....."

After reading all the words, Artpe's gaze once again headed towards the altar with the books placed on top of it. One was a spell book and the other one was a skill book. He had wondered why he couldn't read the content of the books with his Read All

Creation ability. The flow of the Record Link was connected to the books.

He had never expected to see skills that were completed using the influence of magic. In his past life as one of the Four Heavenly Kings, he had never heard of such a thing.

Maybe it was a matter of course since no one in his past life had discovered this place. He had always believed that Record Link was full of side effect, so he never thought about such unimaginable benefits it could bring.

‘The Record Link wasn’t made with the intent of just tormenting us...’

Artpe was enlightened. Of course, the anger at the sunbae, who had driven Maetel and him to the brink of death, still remained!

“This sunbae really cared about his juniors!”

“I think so, too. Now let us worry about what is to come.”

“Huh?”

He was now sure of the sunbae hero’s intent. However, Artpe’s personality wouldn’t let him cross a stone bridge when he could destroy and build a steel bridge. He used his Read All Creation ability to carefully inspect his surrounding.

“Hmmm.....”

“What is it, Artpe?”

“It’s nothing. It just feels a little bit off to me. However, I don’t see anything abnormal.”

He was sure there were no additional traps here. He was only slightly worried about the fact that all the Mana within the Dungeon was being funneled into the altar..... Since they had already reached this point, they couldn’t make additional preparations. There was nothing they could do that would make them more prepared for what was to come.

If so, it was time to move forward. It didn't matter what was waiting for them. It was time to act.

“I’m ready, Artpe.”

“Me too……. Alright. Now.”

“Yes!”

Artpe and Maetel exchanged glances. They stepped forward at the same time, and they reached out their hands towards their respective book. At that moment, they felt a pressure as if their entire body was being sucked towards the book. Their hands stuck to the books.

“Koohk!?”

“Endure it. If we falter here, the Record Link will run out of control!”

All the Mana within the Dungeon was flowing towards the two books placed on top of the altar. All the records that had mounted for the past year was being split into two. It flowed into the two books using the Record Link, and after it finished its mission, it dissipated.

“Hoo… Ha.”

“Ooh-ahhhhh. I’m tired. This is too difficult.”

“Endure it!”

All the tasks completed by Artpe and Maetel was influenced by the effect of overwhelming Mana, and it was formed into a skill and a spell. Each appeared in front of their respective owners. However, Artpe’s face crumpled when the new magic spell established itself within his brain.

‘This is…….’

When he entered this Dungeon, he had accomplished his tasks by using Mana. What he did was more of a magic manipulation rather than using a magic spell. Still, he never expected a strange magic that contradicted the root theories of magic and Mana to come into being!

If he learned to use it properly, he thought it could be something incredible. However, this was a magic spell unbecoming a magician! It was questionable as to whether he should actually call this a magic spell!

“Ssssp. Since this is a Unique Magic for heroes, I have no choice but to learn it... Ooh-ahhhhhhhh!”

At that moment, a big event occurred. What would happen if the Mana maintaining the Dungeon was split and sent into the books on the altar? Of course, the Dungeon would collapse! Artpe had been worrying about such a situation !

“I knew something like this would happen! Shit! That bugger of a sunbae!”

An advanced concept of magical circuitry was being impressed upon his body. However, he didn’t even have the chance to be happy about it. He had to learn the skill as soon as possible, so he could escape this Dungeon!

Artpe grinded his teeth as he looked towards Maetel. In terms of battle skills, she possessed a god-given talent. If it’s Maetel, she should be learning the skill at a faster rate than him...

“Ughh.”

“Hey you foooooooooooooool!”

Maetel had her head down as if she was perfectly powerless. He never expected her to fail at acquiring the skill! The timing of this was too perfect. This was like a bad joke! He wished she would do this at a later time when they could afford to do so!

Artpe gritted his teeth as he raised his hand. The blue leather bound book had already done its part, so it was completely gone now. He would be able to use the magic at any time.

He could use it right now.

“Mana String!”

Others wouldn’t be able to see it, but strings of black mana extended out from his five fingers. Up until now, Artpe had directly manipulated Mana to solve problems in the Dungeon. The reason being he had only a single spell in his arsenal. It seemed the Unique magic spell was fixed into taking on a similar form!

“Koohp. Break it all!”

Of course, Artpe would have been very disappointed if that was all there was to it. However, the Mana String he was using was undeniably a spell. It was a miracle that started out as Mana, but it was shaped into becoming a spell. Unlike the threads he manipulated before, the Mana String could interact with magical energy. Moreover, it was very high in physical power as it was able to affect nature.

This was why the five strands of Mana String was able to stop the Dungeon's ceiling from collapsing, and falling on top of their heads.

"Artpe is incredible! You are too strong!"

"If you have the time to be impressed by me, you should learn the Skill!"

"But this is too hard... Ughhh."

"Hey you foooooooooooooool!"

It didn't matter if Artpe's mana reserve was enormous. It was impossible to prop up the Dungeon's collapsing ceiling indefinitely! Artpe screamed as he diligently controlled the Mana Strings. Maetel clung desperately to the skill book.

"Hurry, Maetel!"

"Ooooooooooh, ughhhhhh.....!"

The black Mana Strings boasted an overwhelmingly more powerful destructive force compared to the ones that controlled the shield with the Slow Down curse. Moreover, there were five of them!

The five long strands of black Mana Strings started to spin violently, and it was grinding up the entire Dungeon. Artpe was fighting desperately. He had activated the Hyper Rubbing. It was such an overpowering sight that it made one wonder if he was really fighting for his life.

"My Mana consumption is that much higher! Hurry up and succeed before it is too late, Maetel! I'll do anything you want if you succeed! Please hurry up!"

"Anything!? Ah, I did it! I learned it! Hurray!"

"You are really honest about your desires!"

The red leather bound book was finally gone! By the look of Maetel's bright eyes, it seemed she had learned the skill. He was puzzled as to why a genius of martial arts like Maetel had struggled to learn the skill. He wondered what it was. However, Artpe didn't have the time to ask such questions!

"Artpe! The altar!"

"I know. Hurry up and take my hand!"

It seemed the disappearance of the two books was a trigger. The altar kept spinning as it lowered into the ground. The flow of water that had been swirling around the space started to gather itself towards the space vacated by the altar. The water was being sucked into it.

After he checked what was going on, he quickly grabbed Maetel's hand. He used his other hand to destroy the rocks that were falling towards them. They threw themselves into the portal where the water was exiting. There must be a path leading outside!

"Artpe, I don't think this tunnel is intact....."

"Of course. There isn't much Mana left. That bastard of a sunbae was good at handling spells, but he was terrible at preserving and distributing Mana. That damn...!"

Fortunately, they could see a faint light at the end of the passageway. Artpe spat out all kinds of swear words as water splashed every time they took a step. They moved quickly.

It was around this time when Maetel was finally free from the aftereffect of acquiring the skill. She bit her lips as she tugged at his hand, and she carried him on her back.

"Record Divide!"

"What the hell. What does that skill with the slightly cool name do..... Ooh-ohhhhhh!?"

Maetel started running faster. It was as if she was about to evaporate the water on the floor with her blazing speed. She did so in the nick of time, since the passageway started to collapse. An incredible amount of water was falling towards them!

"Eee-ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Artpe was having a hard time seeing his surrounding, so he desperate extended his Mana Strings. He dispersed the water and the falling rock fragments that were falling towards their heads.

“Hurrerrrrrrrry up, Maetel!”

“We are almost there! I can see the exit, Artpe!”

The light was getting closer. However, Artpe’s Mana was also bottoming out! They had only a little ways to go. Were they going to be buried like this? It was an end befitting the weakest amongst the Four Heavenly Kings, but Maetel was also here with him!

“I’ll give you my Mana, Artpe!”

“.....Uh? Do you even have Mana to spare... Uh?”

Mana started flowing into him from Maetel. Artpe hadn’t used his Link magic. At that moment, Artpe was taken aback, but he soon came to an understanding.

“You said Record Drive. You...”

“The skill has a similar effect as Artpe’s magic! It has a wider range of use... Anyways, hurry!”

Maetel didn’t have to urge him on. He was already using his spell. All the Mana received from her was put straight into the Mana Strings.

Before Artpe and Maetel’s heads could be bashed open, the chunks of rocks were grinded away in an instant. They threw themselves towards the light right before they reached the end of the passageway.

“Ooh-wahhhhhhhh,, Artpe-ehhhhhhhhhhhh!”

“Yes! This is it!”

He could hear the sound of water. Water was everywhere. Artpe let out a refreshing smile as he shouted out his words.

“It’s a waterfall! Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck!”

This was how the heroes were successful in escaping their very first Dungeon. The two heroes were 13 years old, and they were beings that defied all the records and history of the continent. This was the moment when the strongest little hero duo stepped out into the world.



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